Nation’s pediatricians to address needs of immigrant children, families

SAN DIEGO – Pediatricians will discuss how they can meet the physical, social and emotional needs of immigrant children during a half-day session at the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) National Conference & Exhibition in San Diego.

“With the current influx of immigrants (especially unaccompanied minor immigrants) and the polarity of immigration legislation and laws, providing medical care for immigrants has never been more stressful and more important,” said William H. Cotton, MD, FAAP, a member of the AAP Council on Community Pediatrics. The council is hosting the session, which will be held from 8 a.m. to noon PDT on Monday, Oct. 13 at the Hilton Bayfront Hotel.

A 2013-2014 AAP survey found that 95 percent of pediatricians see immigrant children in their practice. The session will cover how physicians can address the medical needs of these youth as well as issues related to trauma experienced during migration and resettlement.

Other topics to be addressed include:
- successful practices for providing care to immigrant children with special health care needs;
- strategies for working with families;
- screening youth for emotional needs;
- provision of culturally and linguistically appropriate care; and
- partnering with legal and community organizations to improve immigrant children’s health and well-being.

The sheer numbers of children recently coming to the border has made the issue of immigration a very political topic, said Fernando S. Mendoza, MD, MPH, FAAP, one of the presenters and professor of pediatrics at Lucile Packard Children Hospital, Palo Alto, Calif. “The politics clearly is something that is a concern for many, but at the same time it challenges us to reflect upon our American values when dealing with children vs. the politics of immigration.”

It is important to distinguish between refugees and immigrants, Dr. Mendoza said. “Migrants move from place to place to seek a better life. Refugees come because their lives or freedom are at risk.” Accounts by unaccompanied children arriving at the U.S. border from Central America indicate that they are coming because their lives are in danger, he said.

“For the most part, our pediatricians, our Academy members have stepped up to the plate to take care of these kids,” Dr. Mendoza said. “That really makes me proud to be a pediatrician. It gives us a chance as Americans, as health professionals, as people who care about kids to say, ‘Here’s the way we should treat these kids.’”
The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 62,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety and well-being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults. For more information, visit www.aap.org.