

# After Hours

By: Joanna Norris

A phone triage service update

Developing medical homes so that every child in Jacksonville can have a place to access high-quality physician care around the clock, by accessing the use of an after-hours triage service, is the goal of some local pediatric physicians.

Dr. Aylin Ozdemir, M.D., of Pediatric Associates of Jacksonville, the city's largest pediatric practice, first brought Nurse Response – an after-hours telephone triage service that uses a centralized electronic process to coordinate communication in addition to the human care factor of care coordination – to her practice last year. She felt the service was necessary because the volume of patients between the four local branches is incredible and it would help physicians provide a continuity of care to their patients after hours.



Local pediatricians Drs. David Wood and Aylin Ozdemir are working to bring efficient after-hours phone triage service to Jacksonville.

When Ozdemir first subscribed to the service, her practice averaged about 350 calls per month. As a result of using the after-hours service, the call volume has decreased to 250 per month. “Calls have decreased because Nurse Response has been able to educate our parents,” said Ozdemir. “The same information they hear from us during the day is being reinforced after hours by trained and skilled nurses,” added Ozdemir, who notes parents love the after-hours phone service because they get step-by-step help. Ozdemir also felt the Hollywood, Florida-based Nurse Response, would aid her patients in the proper utilization of emergency room (ER) services.

Recently, Ozdemir applied for a local \$100,000 grant to prove that the after-hours triage service has curtailed unnecessary emergency room visits. “The triage service has made our patients better understand what medical situations are truly emergent.”

She’s not alone.

Ozdemir’s goal has been to make the triage service available to pediatric patients citywide. And she’s getting closer to her dream. Along with fellow physicians such as

David Wood, M.D., University of Florida professor of pediatrics and division chief of community pediatrics, are in the process of forming a medical consortium of pediatric leaders in the community in order to apply for a federal grant.

The initial installment of the three-year grant would be \$1 million the first year, \$700,000 the second year and \$400,000 for the third year. The grant would be used by pediatric practices that serve the uninsured and underinsured.

Wood says the after-hours triage service is part of a broader picture. He believes children also need medical homes, a local pediatric practice, to help coordinate their care and refer them to specialists as well as community services.

“The medical home helps the family coordinate all those factors by educating them and helping them get the services the child needs, mutually developing a plan and then being available to them to make it happen.”

Oftentimes parents drop the ball regarding their child’s health because they wither don’t know what to do or don’t have the resources. Eventually the children of these families fall through the cracks of the healthcare system. “We’re trying to change the whole philosophy of care so that families have a better connection with the healthcare system in a rational, organized way,” explains Wood, “Part of that can be accomplished with the after-hours triage – where a nurse can spend the time educating the caller, documenting the call, and making sure of a follow up.”

Both Ozdemir and Wood agree that support from local pediatric medical leaders and others, is needed for the success and fruition of this project that would ultimately benefit all of Jacksonville’s children. H

*Joanna Norris is a Jacksonville-based freelance writer.*

**Editors Note: This story is a follow-up to an article that appeared in the December 2003 issue of H Magazine. The original story can be found on our web site at [HforHealth.com](http://HforHealth.com).**

