

## Advancing Technology to Support Pediatrician-Family Partnerships

By: Paul H. Dworkin, MD

I have long characterized our work over many decades as the relentless pursuit of the answer to the question, “How do we best transform child health services to strengthen families to promote children’s optimal health, development, and well-being?” Our research has repeatedly emphasized the critical importance of ensuring that the guidance we offer to parents and families is driven by their priorities and interests, and that we address issues in a manner consistent with families’ cultural, cognitive, and psychological readiness. Our work on the early detection of developmental and behavioral issues has highlighted the importance of the regular and routine eliciting of parents’ opinions and concerns for their children. While these concepts and lessons learned are important, we are challenged to operationalize them in a manner that is feasible and meaningful to parents and providers, alike.

Thanks to a collaborative funding effort among several national foundations, we are privileged to participate in an initiative called Pediatrics Supporting Parents (PsP). In the words of the funders, “PsP is a group of national early childhood funders focused on cultivating healthy social and emotional development in our country’s youngest, most vulnerable children, valuing the important role parents play in that development, and seizing the opportunity for pediatricians to better support parents in this role”. PsP funders invited The Help Me Grow (HMG) National Center to join the initiative during its first phase to explore the need, interest, feasibility, and cost of an integrated technology platform designed to support families and transform the well-child visit. The goal of this phase of the project was to systematically address qualitative and quantitative input from parents and providers to move toward a shared conceptualization of an integrated, modular technological intervention with the potential to strengthen the well-child visit in its capacity to address children’s social-emotional development and promote parent engagement. To accomplish this, we solicited the perspectives of parents, caregivers, and child health providers and conducted key stakeholder interviews. We also performed an analysis of technological integration among existing tools. The National Affiliate Network proved a remarkably rich resource to hear from parents firsthand about their interests and needs with respect to their child’s development and well-child visits.

Our findings from the first phase suggested there is a high level of baseline interest among parents and providers for an integrated technology platform that enables parents to arrive to the visit informed about important developmental milestones and armed with information that enables them to ensure important priority areas and questions are discussed. Several themes arose during our surveys and interviews to inform the best approach to design, implement, and scale novel tools that focus on strengthening the well-child visit to promote children’s optimal health, development, and well-being. Based on our findings, we concluded that such an integrated product has the potential to radically transform the landscape of child health services and is worthy of further exploration.

The funders have now invited us to participate in the second phase of the PsP initiative by leveraging findings from the initial planning and exploration phase. **This phase of our work will**

**involve the development and marketing of a novel, integrated pediatric technology platform comprised of various innovative tools and designed for effectiveness at the level of the child, parent, and provider.** Tools will, for example, enable parents to set the agenda for their children's health visits, offer guidance on activities to promote children's optimal development, elicit parents' opinions and concerns for their children's development and behavior, and assist in linking families to desired community resources. The platform will also offer integration with child health practices and the capacity to interface with electronic medical records. This work will be guided by a group of key advisors comprised of national experts and key partners with expertise in the policy and practice implications of transforming child health services.

In an effort to ensure that this integrated product benefits from a comprehensive array of potential tools, we will develop and deploy a structured Letter of Interest which will describe the opportunity to participate and solicit interested partners. Upon selection of the tool developers, a prototype will be created for further testing and refinement with expert consultation from Patient Tools, Inc. Critical to the eventual scaling of the integrated platform will be its capacity to meaningfully and feasibly connect to other child-serving sectors in the community. As such, the HMG National Center will leverage its affiliate network of over 100 systems in more than 30 states to test a prototype of the integrated platform over the next year.

We believe that this integrated technology platform has the potential to radically transform the landscape of child health services by strengthening the well-child visit in its capacity to address children's social-emotional development and promote parent engagement. We look forward to now partnering with our National Affiliate Network, tool developers, and expert advisors to take the next steps in bringing this tool to its potential.

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