West of the Rockies

Speaker's Corner

What's up, Doc?

I see a lot of doctors. There's my pediatrician, my endocrinologist, my dermatologist, my gynecologist, and my allergist, who has expertise in chiropractic medicine and acupressure. (I see him whenever I have back and neck problems.) And I know how hard it is to talk to all of them, especially when I have embarrassing problems and questions.

THE OLDEST KID IN THE WAITING ROOM

My family belongs to a health care group where you see the pediatrician until you're 18. At 17, you're the oldest kid in the waiting room. You can barely fit in the chairs; all the little kids look up and stare, at the giant child, in awe.

It feels funny when you have to talk to your doctor about sex, this same person who saw you naked when you were 2 years old. And then, there are those times when you don't have questions about sex or other sensitive issues and yet the doctor thinks you do. I recall seeing a doctor one time because I had the flu. He started asking questions about my menstrual cycle, asked my mother to leave the room, and eventually accused me of being pregnant. I understand that he had seen many girls, just like me, who were pregnant, but I was not—I had the flu. I pleaded and explained, and he finally understood.

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Danielle Gerber 1999

TEENAGERS SHOULD NOT BE AFRAID TO TALK TO THEIR DOCTORS

No one should feel uncomfortable talking to their doctors about anything. It is important for me to be able to ask any question and to get sound medical advice that can keep me healthy and to prevent pregnancy or AIDS. I used to think that if I had sensitive questions or problems that my parents might find out about what I said to my doctor. But I learned about doctor-patient confidentiality and so I am no longer afraid to ask important questions or talk to my doctors.

Michelle Goodman

Age 18 years, Los Angeles, California

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Michelle Goodman offers tips to doctors on how to talk to teens in *Curbside Consult* on page 207