



Pediatrician Job Profile

By Allyson Parks

If you think a career in pediatric medicine is just runny noses and sore throats, think again. Pediatrics offers just as many diverse opportunities as adult medicine, but with the added opportunity to help individuals during developmental years that shape the course of their adult health.



According to the US Department of Labor's *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, "General pediatricians care for the health of infants, children, teenagers, and young adults. They specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of a

variety of ailments specific to young people and track patients' growth to adulthood."

General pediatricians most often treat the everyday illnesses, infectious diseases, and minor injuries that are common to children, while also providing immunizations. Others specialize in pediatric surgery; particular fields like oncology, cardiology, and endocrinology; or certain conditions such as chronic ailments, asthma, and autoimmune disorders.

Everyday responsibilities include examining patients, reviewing and recording medical histories, administering tests, and prescribing treatments and medications. Pediatricians also counsel parents about healthy ways of raising children and encourage a nurturing home environment.

Due to the physiological and size differences between children and adults, pediatricians are focused more on genetic variance, developmental issues, and congenital defects. They also deal with immunizations and inherited diseases more often than do adult physicians; such afflictions include sickle cell anemia, thalassemias, and cystic fibrosis.

Because children are minors and cannot make their own decisions, pediatrics also deals extensively with issues of informed consent, guardianship, legal responsibility, and privacy. Pediatricians often deal more with the parents and family than the patient.

Like most medical practitioners, pediatricians must complete four or five years in medical school, a year-long internship during which one is immersed in pediatric training, and a residency training program which varies in length depending upon the field of specialization.

Adolescent medicine includes all the subspecialties of adult medicine but often deals with conditions that are rare in adults, such as rotavirus infections, bronchiolitis, certain leukemias, and lymphomas.

General pediatricians or neonatologists in hospital practice are often needed for problems occurring around the time of birth, such as those resulting from caesarean sections and other high-risk births. This particular area of pediatric medicine is likely to experience growth, as a May 29th *Los Angeles Times* article reported that the number of US preterm births — those occurring after 34 to 36 weeks of gestation — grew by more than a third within the last ten years, primarily due to the rising number of caesarean sections, many of which are elective. Individuals in pediatric medicine, especially in neonatal-perinatal medicine, are needed now more than ever, as this increase in preterm births has given rise to such health problems as difficulties regulating body temperature, immature organs, feeding problems, jaundice, and breathing problems.

Dr. Stephen R. Daniels, Pediatrician-in-Chief and the L. Joseph Butterfield Chair in Pediatrics at the Children's Hospital in Denver, Colorado, said his decision to work in pediatric medicine stemmed from fond recollections of his own childhood pediatrician, according to the hospital's website.

"My perception, even as a small child, was that this man was doing important work, helping kids live healthy, happy lives. So from a young age, medicine, and specifically medicine focusing on children, seemed a good path, something to aspire to," Daniels said.

Chairman of the Council on Cardiovascular Disease in the Young for the American Heart Association, Daniels concentrated his research on childhood obesity and how it is associated with cardiovascular irregularities in children, including complications with heart function, blood pressure, and cholesterol. Daniels was quoted in the May 23rd issue of the *Charleston Gazette* in an article discussing how obesity rates have declined amongst West Virginia's children.



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He spoke about the importance of not only involving parents in concerns about obesity and health promotion, but also encouraging children to focus on their health and the severity of the situation.

“Children and adolescents tend to think of themselves as healthy, and they tend not to be concerned about long-term health impacts,” he said.

According to *Pediatrics: The Official Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics*, Dr. Thomas F. Tonniges explained his views on a career in pediatrics, in his speech accepting the 2005 Job Lewis Smith Award.

“I thought of my role as solely to provide good medicine to the children who came through my clinic. But as time passed, I began to understand that being a pediatrician involved much more than providing good care to patients and sound advice to their parents...There were children in my community...who, for whatever reason, were not receiving the medical care, physical protection, family nurturing, and education that would allow them to grow to their full potential as adults. I began to understand that to be a truly good pediatrician, I must be a good advocate for all children, not just those whose parents brought them to the clinic,” Tonniges said.

A career in pediatrics is actually quite flexible, and, should you choose to pursue one, you would have considerable independence regarding where and how you practice — in your own office, with a group of doctors, in a hospital, in research, etc. Additionally, about 15% of pediatricians only work part-time.

The Medical Group Management Association states that pediatricians with more than four years of experience earned an average annual salary of \$161,331 in 2004.

The US Bureau of Labor Statistics projects the number of jobs in pediatric medicine to grow by more than 18%, largely due to new treatments and technologies for childhood illnesses.

Students interested in pursuing such a career should shadow a pediatrician on his or her hospital rounds to gain further insight. Volunteering or working at a children’s hospital can also provide excellent experience. For example, Children’s Hospital in Los Angeles offers a volunteer research program for high school, undergraduate, and postgraduate students in which students perform experiments under the supervision of a faculty mentor.

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