Second Opinions

Air bag dilemma

I read with interest your article on air bag safety in the January 1997 AAP News. Although I agree with the Academy's rear seat placement of children, I have a personal exception that stresses the need for a legal optional on/off switch for passenger side air bags in vehicles with a rear seat.

My wife and I have four small children age 6 and under. They are seated and belted appropriately in the rear seats of our minivan. However, if our minivan should become inoperative and my wife or I should have to take all four children emergently somewhere, my petite 6-year-old would have to be belted in the front passenger seat of my vehicle (a four-door sedan that seats five) and has a passenger side air bag that I bought two years ago thinking it was safe for all family members.

A simple solution, until new designs are made that would take my child out of peril, would be to legally allow me to have an on/off switch for the passenger side air bag for the rare circumstance that I would have all four children in the car.

I hope the Academy will lobby the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration for this ruling, instead of lobbying for total deactivation of the passenger side air bag for people with exceptions.

Lawrence Bennett, M.D., FAAP
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School evaluations

While I admire Dr. Cunningham’s refusal to see children for evaluation unless the school has done one (AAP News, January 1997), I have a problem emulating him. You see, in my part of the country, upstate New York, the school districts ignore many children with problems.

Yes, I do spend a lot of my time explaining terms to parents and telling them of their children’s rights and sometimes referring them to advocates. But is this not also part of a pediatrician’s job, as so eloquently stated in the same issue by Stanford Singer, M.D., FAAP?

Among the other rights I tell parents about is that their children are entitled to evaluations by their school district of residence, no matter what school they attend or even if they attend none. I think this is the same federal law that applies in Delaware.

One school district in this area has a very direct way of evaluating non-public school children. Brighton Central School District is home to parochial schools of three denominations and two non-denominational private schools. When a child at one of these schools needs an evaluation, Brighton does it and then bills the home school district if the student does not live in Brighton.

Being aware of laws, events and conditions, and being able to explain them, is part of being a physician.

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Team effort

I beg to differ significantly with Dr. Cunningham’s Point of View concerning the role of the pediatrician as a member of the team to evaluate children with learning disabilities, with or without ADHD. Having dealt for many years with such youngsters and the co-morbidities which frequently accompany these conditions, I feel strongly that a pediatrician with special expertise in this field should be a member of an evaluation team.

As we all know, children with LD often have problems with ADHD and vice versa. This brings about the question whether and when medication should be used. The frustrations, often severe, which so frequently accompany these conditions are often significant enough that the pediatrician should discuss them with the youngster. Waiting lists should not be a problem if sufficient facilities are available. We established two clinics in our town (pop. approx. 110,000) which evaluate, diagnose and treat children with ADHD/LD. The University of Iowa and its Child Development Clinic is only 25 miles away.

As I see it, pediatricians should not only “step back” – as Dr. Cunningham advises – but should be willing to take enough time with such children, or turn the child over to a colleague with special expertise in the field.

Although the situation is improving, I am still concerned about the number of pediatricians not sufficiently trained to deal properly with children with ADHD/LD.

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My friend Len

I was very saddened to learn of the recent death of Leonard Peter Rome, M.D., FAAP. I admired him not only for his devotion to the goals and mission of the American Academy of Pediatrics, but because, in my mind, he was the