Developmental pediatrician to take anxiety out of psychopharmacology
by Carla Kemp, Senior Editor


As a primary care doctor in a relatively rural area, Rebecca A. Baum, M.D., FAAP, had to figure out on her own how to prescribe psychotropic medications.

Now a developmental behavioral pediatrician at the Olson Huff Center at Mission Children’s Hospital in Asheville, N.C., Dr. Baum wants to spare primary care pediatricians the trouble.
"I'd like to make it easier for practitioners and also ensure that patients and families get high-quality, timely care in the medical home setting," she said.

To that end, she will present "Psychopharmacology for Primary Care Providers" (L3104) from 10-11 a.m. CDT on Sunday, Oct. 4.

Dr. Baum said she plans to use case vignettes and provocative questions to keep viewers engaged as she discusses the most commonly used psychotropic medications in primary care to treat conditions such as anxiety, depression and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

"Not only will we cover the science related to psychotropic medications, we'll also pay attention to the art of prescribing - how to prevent and address anxiety and resistance related to medication use," said Dr. Baum, a member of the AAP Section on Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics.

Dr. Baum has seen firsthand how prescribing psychotropic medications can be challenging for primary care pediatricians.

"Many of us had limited exposure to this topic during our training and have had to learn it on the fly in practice," she said. "For some practitioners, that's meant avoiding medication prescribing, and for others they've become one of a few practitioners in their office who prescribes psychotropics, which can become overwhelming."

In addition, primary care physicians may be worried about the potential for comorbid conditions.

"While it's true that co-occurring conditions are common," Dr. Baum said, "with a little knowledge and detective work, we can usually make sense of what's going on and find a place to start."

The COVID-19 pandemic also has added some new wrinkles when it comes to providing behavioral health services, which Dr. Baum will address. For example, while it's unlikely that stress from the pandemic will require medication, the added pressures could exacerbate depression and anxiety symptoms, she said. In addition, it's unclear how children with ADHD will respond to virtual learning and how pediatricians will assess and intervene when children have attentional difficulties.

"A bright spot of the pandemic is that behavioral health services have adapted well to telehealth, and we want to continue to rely on this type of treatment for help with coping skills and stress reduction," she added.

Dr. Baum said primary care practitioners can rest assured that the medications she will discuss are safe, effective and appropriate for use in the primary care setting.

"With the knowledge of a handful of medications, the primary care provider has a powerful armamentarium to
treat several mental health conditions that commonly present in primary care," she said.

A recording of the session will be available via the virtual platform through Jan. 31, 2021.