



# Early intervention for patients and pediatrics in our community

## The Children's Care Network

This month marks my **27th anniversary** as a pediatrician, and I believe I have the best job in the world. My patients need me and I need them—we grow and develop together. I have never wanted to do anything else with my life, but lately our healthcare market and declining Medicaid reimbursements make it harder for my business to stay afloat. We have to see more patients for fewer reimbursement dollars. Some patients are choosing to visit the emergency room instead of my office because the hours are more convenient. Some parents just aren't willing to wait for an office appointment.



**KidCare Pediatrics consists of two offices south of Atlanta with a diverse patient population. Approximately 55 percent of my patients rely on Medicaid, and that figure is growing as more and more patients are unable to afford health care.**

I opened my practice in this community knowing that it wouldn't be easy. Many patient families don't have the resources they need to take ownership of their own healthcare or deal with the peripheral factors that may contribute to their overall health, such as eating a nutritious diet or preventing environmental hazards in their home. Also, patients that do have private insurance may be limited by higher copays and deductibles that make it more difficult for families to access healthcare now than before the market changes occurred.

But I refuse to allow my patients to receive anything less than the best care I can offer them. After all, they deserve it, and a healthy childhood will give them the best chance at a healthy adulthood. I know I'm not the only one dealing with these issues.

As pediatricians, we have to find some way to address these challenges.

I believe The Children's Care Network, formed to create a new clinically integrated network for kids, will provide solutions. As a part of the network, member physicians will have greater access to resources that can help enhance the quality of care we offer our patients and families.

Furthermore, network members will be part of a large pool of providers who together can help demonstrate our value to payers. We also contemplate providing access to cost savings through group purchasing power for items that detract from our bottom line.

Quickly seeing the value of the network, I engaged early by joining the original steering committee. I now serve on the board of directors and have stayed active throughout our membership drive in 2015. We are ready to put our plans into action, and I'm excited about the structure we have established to be successful.

There are 22 physicians and one nonphysician on the board, so it truly is physician-led. Less than 25 percent of the board is employed by Children's, and community-based physicians make up more than half of the board. We know that our independent voices will be heard by the group. I have been impressed that the board's priorities focus on doing the right thing for our patients and helping us survive in this ever-changing market.

Looking forward, the network has the potential to become extremely important to the community as pediatricians, specialists and hospitals come together and collaborate on the best care for patients and each other. This structure provides a more synergistic environment for us all.

It is my hope that when the inevitable happens and I leave my practice one day, it will provide even better care to the community than I am providing now. The network is building the best framework for me to make that happen.

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*By Dr. Helena Bentley, Director/Pediatric Provider, KidCare Pediatrics*

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