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His scrubs are green

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Pediatricians are used to considering the health effects of the environment on children. Every day they test kids for lead poisoning, treat young patients with asthma and allergies, and question how frequently they diagnose autism and neurological disorders.

Now an Oradell pediatrician is considering how his own medical practice impacts the environment.

Dr. Lawrence Rosen, medical advisor to the Deirdre Imus Environmental Center for Pediatric Oncology, has opened what could be the first "green" pediatric office in northern New Jersey.

The office is built and furnished with non-toxic materials, from examination tables to ceiling tiles and paint. Exam rooms are suffused with natural light. Medical records are electronic. Paper, plastic and glass are recycled, and a disposal program for patients' unused medications is in the works.

Rosen, rocking in a chair he says is 97 percent recyclable, said his office is "safe for the environment and safe for humans." His practice is called the Whole Child Center.

"With all the issues we have today with chronic illnesses and our children, he serves as a real example of modern-day medicine," said Deirdre Imus, who quotes Rosen throughout her book, "Growing Up Green! Baby and Child Care."

"He's really made it a priority to practice what he teaches" by emphasizing prevention and a holistic approach to children's health, she said. Rosen spent part of last summer at the Imus Ranch in New Mexico working with kids with cancer. While there, he set up homeopathic treatment instructions for common problems such as bug bites, sun burn, headache and colds, she said.

The new office rides the cultural current of environmental consciousness and marketing, as architects, schools, stores and religious congregations "go green."

Environmentally friendly practices in internal medicine, dentistry, chiropractic and other specialties have opened around the country in recent years, according to the Teleosis Institute in Berkeley, which offers a "green health care" course. Rosen, a graduate, is on the advisory board.

"It's a new model of medicine," says Niyati Desai, the institute's associate director. This philosophy considers "not only how the environment is affecting our health, but how humans — the medical industry — affects the environment." Teleosis focuses on small healthcare practices.

Doctors are considering such practices as whether to use disposable, single-use paper gowns for every patient or washable cotton. Rosen is planning to use organic cotton gowns that will be washed in biodegradable laundry detergent.

To be truly green, Rosen says, medicine should also follow an "integrative" approach — one combining "safe and effective complementary and alternative medical therapies" with conventional medicine.

That doesn't mean he avoids vaccinating children for standard communicable diseases.

"I want to make it very clear that I am in favor of vaccination," he says. He'll work with families to discuss their concerns, he says. Some have pointed to childhood vaccines as a potential cause of the rising rates of autism, although the national Institute of Medicine said there was no evidence to support that claim.

Classes in infant massage and yoga are among the extras at the Whole Child Center, taught by its clinical coordinator, Karen Overgaard, a certified holistic nurse and health counselor.

Integrative pediatrics also views the child as more than a physical being, says Rosen, founder of the Integrative Pediatrics Council and member of the American Academy of Pediatrics' section on integrative medicine. It considers the child's emotional and spiritual make-up, and the context of their lives within the family.

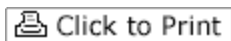
Lori Ruschman, whose two children are Rosen's patients, says she came to the practice because of "his approach — to be open-minded about alternative therapies. He doesn't jump the gun in suggesting medication right off the bat. He listens to the parent, to my concerns."

Many families already are seeking out natural therapies for their children, such as herbal ear drops or vitamin regimens, Rosen says. They look for ways to treat sleep problems and obesity without medication or surgery.

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