

UT News

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****New children's sleep center in Dallas
to see all sleep disorders

DALLAS -- John Herman, faculty member at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas, is one health professional who believes that children need special help. And the sleep specialist has recently backed up his beliefs by becoming director of a new Sleep Disorders Center for Children at Children's Medical Center of Dallas, UTHSCD's pediatric teaching hospital.

Herman, who received his Ph.D. in psychology from Yeshiva University and Albert Einstein College of Medicine in 1970, has been working with sleep problems in both adults and children at the Dallas health science center for the past 10 years. In his position with the Department of Psychiatry, he sees private patients and is involved in sleep research.

Herman said that he will be treating patients with all types of sleep disorders in the new facility at CMC, as well as conducting research studies. These childhood disorders will range from insomnia to apneas (disorders in which breathing is obstructed) to infants and children with severe respiratory disorders to narcolepsy to clinical depression. Children who suffer from night terrors, frequent sleepwalking episodes, nightmares (also called anxiety dreams) and sleep related seizures will also be seen in the center. The psychologist and his staff will work with patients who have problems with enuresis (bedwetting) as well as working with children who have been referred by their physicians for medically related sleep problems.

"In fact, our comprehensive team of specialists will be able to evaluate and diagnose virtually every sleep problem in infants, children and adolescents," he stated. The psychologist suggested that parents who are interested in learning more about their children's sleep problems read Solve Your Child's Sleep Problems by Richard Ferber, M.D., published by Simon & Schuster, Inc., in 1985.

The psychologist pointed out that the opportunity of having a specialized sleep center for children is highly unusual. "Many of the top medical schools in the country have outstanding sleep centers, but none of them have special centers for children -- and many are not prepared to see children at all." Although the center officially only opened on July 14, several cooperative sleep-research projects are already going on. They include the following:

* A drug study in cooperation with pediatric cardiologist Mark Parrish of the UTHSCD faculty on the use of atenolol, a popular beta-blocker, with children who suffer from night terrors. Currently, when drug therapy is indicated for severe sufferers, benzodiazepines (medications used as tranquilizers, muscle-relaxers and somatics) are given.

* A study in cooperation with Dr. Scott Manning, assistant professor of otorhinolaryngology at UTHSCD, to find out whether or not removing the tonsils and adenoids is called for in every case when they are enlarged and seem to obstruct breathing. Herman said, "There has been little documentation of the proportion of cases of surgeries that actually help the problem."

* A study with health science center neurologists Dr. Warren Weinberg and Dr. Dwight Lindholm is examining the relationship between attention deficit disorders and sleep problems. Herman said that there is a possibility that at least some children may have sleep problems that are causing their attention problems at school. "They may be using all their attention just in an effort to stay awake," he explained, "or their vigilance could be sufficiently impaired to get in the way of their listening."

(More)

The pediatric consultant and medical coordinator for the new Pediatric Sleep Disorders Center is Dr. Joel Steinberg, a UTHSCD professor of pediatrics. Specialty consultants for the sleep center include: Drs. Orval Brown, otorhinolaryngology; Graham Emslie, child psychiatry; Robert Leroy, epilepsy and EEG; Immanuela Moss, respiratory disorders; Richard Silver, pediatric pulmonology; and Weinberg and Parrish.

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NOTE: The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas comprises Southwestern Medical School, Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and the School of Allied Health Sciences.