

What is a Medical Home?

By Tammy Mann, Texas Parent to Parent

A Medical Home (MH) is a model of care delivery that your family should already be receiving. It is the end result of parents and health care professionals acting as partners. After all, you both want the same thing, right? ...healthy children and families who are able to achieve their maximum potential. Unfortunately, most parents are not aware of what “medical home” means, most professionals think they already provide it, and the ones that don’t are trying to figure out how to bill for it!



Medical Home is not the “term of the month.” The definition was introduced in 1992 by the American Academy of Pediatrics. They believe “that all children should have a medical home where care is **accessible, family-centered, continuous, comprehensive, coordinated, compassionate and culturally effective.**”

To be fair, health care professionals are not taught about Medical Home in school. Doctors learned to fix what was broken or bleeding, take out what didn’t belong in, add in what was missing... but nowhere in the “rule book” was anything that said “play nice with the patient,” never mind be “**accessible,**” make sure that you take all forms of payment (yes, that means insurance, Medicaid, Medicare, etc.), provide care in the family’s community (not the big city 150 miles away), and make yourself available to speak directly to the families (and not after the family has left 10 messages). The MH model gives “bedside manner” a whole new meaning!

The best thing a medical professional ever said to me was that I know my child better than anyone. Well, if you think about it, that’s true. Who knows our children better than we do? **Family-centered** care means just that - parents are the experts on their children, so why not be teammates with the health care professionals? In a true MH, recognizing that the family is the principal caregiver, the core, the one true constant in the child’s life, is just an extra tool for the provider. Nowhere else can you find a more reliable source for information.

Continuous means that you have the same health care professionals available from infancy through adolescence and young adulthood. AND, they assist with transitions...including those to other pediatric providers or into adult health care systems.

Accessing health care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year should not be difficult if your health care provider has a **comprehensive** office. Ideally, the preventive, primary, and tertiary care needs are addressed in the office, which should cut down on some of those “24 hour a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year” emergency needs.

Providing resources falls into both **comprehensive and compassionate** services. Connecting families to support, educational, and community-based services only proves that the health care professionals understand and are working toward helping your family be the best they can be; it demonstrates concern for well-being, understanding and empathy.

The same can be said for being **culturally effective**. Professional translators or interpreters are great, but truly understanding that a family’s culture, beliefs, rituals, and customs are a part of the “whole” family, are the “framework” of the family, is critical and should be recognized, valued, and respected as families and physicians work together to develop a care plan.

Last, the family care plan should be **coordinated**. It should be developed by the health care provider, child/youth, and family, and shared with other providers, agencies, and organizations involved with the care of the patient. Families are linked to support, educational, and community-based services, a central record containing all pertinent medical information (including hospitalizations, and other specialty care like outside therapies, etc.) is kept and maintained in a central record by the primary provider. This can be your pediatrician, family practitioner, or as in one family I know, your dermatologist.



I hope this gives you a better understanding of what it means when someone says “Medical Home.” ♥