

Communication key to adolescent health outcomes

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Improved communication between pediatric providers and the parents and guardians of adolescents could lead to better health outcomes, a University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine study reports. The findings are available online in this month's Patient Education and Counseling.

Between June and November of 2009, Aletha Akers, M.D., assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology at Pitt and the study's lead author, and her research team administered an anonymous, self-reported questionnaire to a sample of 358 parents accompanying their adolescent children on visits to general outpatient pediatric clinics at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC to assess the main health issues concerning their adolescents.

The questionnaire relied on the parent or guardian's ability to recall their conversations with their adolescent's [health care provider](#) on a range of preventive health topics including nutrition, mental health, physical activity, sexual activity and [substance abuse](#). According to Dr. Akers, most parents could recall discussing at least one adolescent preventive health topic with their adolescent's care provider. They were much more likely to recall discussing general prevention topics like [physical activity](#) and nutrition than they were to recall discussing more sensitive topics like [sexual activity](#), substance abuse and [mental health issues](#).

"Adolescence is a relatively healthy period of life, and most adolescent morbidity comes from participating in high-risk behaviors. Most preventive health conversations between parents and providers take place

during early childhood, but such communication is arguably even more important during the adolescent years, when adolescents' health choices could directly influence [health outcomes](#)," said Dr. Akers.

"Ideally, these results are the first step toward improving communication between pediatric care providers and parents and guardians," Dr. Akers added. "By building on tools we already have in place, we can improve conversations about high-risk health behaviors, including incorporating screening and counseling practices into acute care visits or visits for school physicals, since many adolescents miss their annual well-child check-ups. The use of electronic medical records can remind care providers of essential health topics that need to be discussed with adolescents and their guardians."

Provided by University of Pittsburgh Medical Center

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