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### Caretaking Amid COVID-19: Strategies for Patient Protection

Dr. Shu:

Coming to you from the ReachMD studios in Fort Washington, Pennsylvania, this is the *Clinician's Roundtable*. I'm Dr. Jennifer Shu, and on this episode I'm going to talk about what my experience caring for patients amid the COVID-19 pandemic has been like.

At the beginning of the pandemic, both our practice and our patients were a little nervous about seeing each other in the office. At that time, it wasn't clear how contagious the SARS-CoV-2 virus was from a respiratory or direct-contact standpoint. We had many families delay their Well-Child Care initially and some even kept their kids home when they were actually sick, for fear that they might catch something else at our office. We always encourage children under 2 years old to keep their Well-Visit appointments so that we could monitor their growth and development, and keep them up to date on immunizations, but many children over this age delayed their checkups and their vaccines, since they weren't getting exposed to people outside their household and weren't in school, and therefore weren't required to get the vaccines in a timely fashion. Since then, we've ramped back up to seeing Well-Child Checkups for all ages, and we are seeing sick patients either at a different time from well patients or in a completely different space from them.

During this pandemic, in addition to potential problems resulting from delayed medical care including immunizations, I've been concerned about children with growth issues ranging from excessive weight gain to significant weight loss and eating disorders. Mental health is also a big potential threat with parents reporting sleep difficulties, mood changes, and behavior problems in even the preschool population, as well as anxiety and depression in school-aged children and teens due to decreased socialization, difficulty with remote learning, or worries about the virus or pandemic itself. Now more than ever, it's important for pediatricians to check in on the emotional well-being of all of our patients and provide resources and treatment when needed.

The pandemic has impacted the way we approach pediatric care, in that we've learned that we need to be flexible and be able to quickly adapt to the needs of our patients as things change. For example, we've bypassed our waiting rooms completely. Our patients now call from their cars to check in, and they don't even enter the office until their exam room is ready. We rapidly implemented telemedicine visits to deal with issues that may not require a hands-on physical exam and have looked for other technological efficiencies to communicate with and care for our patients while still being HIPAA-compliant. We've also gotten more resourceful in obtaining necessary supplies for our practice. In addition to the usual medical supply distributors, we scour sites such as Amazon Business, eBay, and hardware stores regularly, and the AMA state and local medical societies and local hospitals may also be a good source for PPE as well.

For ReachMD, I'm Dr. Jennifer Shu. To access this episode and others in our series, visit [reachmd.com/clinicians-roundtable](https://reachmd.com/clinicians-roundtable) where you can be part of the knowledge. Thanks for tuning in.