



Clinical Update

For Telephone Triage Nurses

July 2019

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In This Issue:

Fever phobia comes from the belief that “all fevers are bad fevers”

We need a new mantra, such as “most fevers are good fevers”

Fever Phobia Revisited

Fever is one of the most common symptoms of illness in children. In our pediatric call center, fever is part of the reported symptom complex in 20% of calls. It’s an isolated symptom in 3% of calls. Fever is also considered the #1 emergency symptom by most parents. All fevers are looked upon as “bad” for you. Small wonder the topic “Fever Facts versus Myths” has become the most common parent handout emailed to parents at the end of a pediatric call (11% of the total topics sent in 2018).

Fever calls just won’t go away. Reason: Many parents have unwarranted fears of harm from the normal fevers that all children experience. This condition is called “fever phobia”. It has been reported that 90% of parents are afraid that fever will cause complications. Some fear that without treatment, fever will keep going higher and higher, even above 110 F.

Where do parents get these crazy ideas? Many parents say they learned them from their child’s doctor or nurse. And although we know we never made such statements, we may have taught it by our behavior or offhand comments. How do you address febrile patients? Do any of the following sound familiar?

- Spend lots of call time talking about fever medicines.
- Treat all fevers with antipyretics, no matter how low grade they are.
- Sometimes tell parents to alternate acetaminophen and ibuprofen. (Fevers must be dangerous if we need to treat them this vigorously).
- Talk lots about “controlling the fever”.
- Say “Call back if you can’t break the fever”.
- Spend lots of time talking about the exact temperature.

If so, you may be a part of the problem.

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Hopefully, we can agree that fever phobia is a problem. It causes unnecessary phone calls to your call center and office. It causes unnecessary ED and UC walk-ins. It causes unnecessary stress and lost sleep for parents.

What's the answer? Let's all stop giving mixed messages and signals. Let's try to provide consistent fever management advice to our callers and the patients in the office. It's a lot to cover and counteract on one phone call. Consider using the attached parent handout on your next phone call from a parent with misconceptions about fever. With the right facts and reassurance, you can become part of the fever phobia solution.

References

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