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I very much appreciate the opportunity to present my strong support for Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs). Anyone who cares for the welfare of children and/or simply wants to provide the best cost effective evidence based response to issues related to child abuse in Pennsylvania should support providing ongoing financial support for CACs.

My perspective comes from over 20 years experience participating in the Lehigh County multidisciplinary community response to reports of concern of possible child abuse and neglect. Initially this involved regular meetings with representatives from Children & Youth, law enforcement, the office of the District Attorney and medical professionals. After an extended planning process and consultation from the National Children's Alliance we developed formal policies and in January 2000 opened the Lehigh County Child Advocacy Center adding county mental health, victim advocacy and eventually forensic interviewer skills to our team. Certification required demonstrating compliance with a set of standards developed by the National Children's Alliance, an organization which developed and continuously updates an evidence based comprehensive, collaborative and cost effective model of managing the response to child abuse. Current members include over 750 sites across the United States. Education across disciplines for the community related to definitions and signs of abuse, how to report and manage concerns of abuse and prevention of maltreatment are important aspects of the mission.

Early on we learned that when you see one CAC you've seen one CAC. The resources and needs of the populations served vary but the standards for certification are uniform. Participation provides a great platform for ongoing improvements in care which is consistent with the way modern medicine approaches the care of patients. My pediatric group at LVHN sees children with suspected child abuse from many counties in Pennsylvania so we have ongoing experience with a variety of systems, frankly a factor in my personal support and advocacy for Children Advocacy Centers.

Much of the public's attention to child abuse is focused on the criminal justice system. Without in any way diminishing the importance of this aspect of community response I would be remiss as a Pediatrician not to share my experience that the manner in which allegations of child abuse and neglect are addressed can have tremendous impact and long term consequences for children and families. While entirely sympathetic to those who feel justice must prevail the legal system is not the final chapter in the life of a child who has been abused. How we manage a child after allegations have come to the surface says a great deal about our values and level of understanding of the dynamics of child abuse.

Those of us who interact with children in these situations are very much aware of the potential negative impact of the evaluation process itself. Advantages to children and families a CAC provides include:

- More coordinated interviews completed in a child focused environment in a timely manner in contrast to disconnected meetings in separate locations with child welfare, law enforcement, attorneys and medical providers.

- Ability to bring many evaluations to timely resolution with little or no disruption to the family while maintaining children in safe environments.
- Communication across experienced professionals who remain current in their knowledge in the various disciplines results in a more complete evaluation and more effective response to the needs of the child and family.
- In many cases one important outcome of disclosure and intervention is the prevention of additional injury to the child or other children.

The criminal justice system also benefits:

- New knowledge in medicine grows at a great rate. The discipline of understanding the spectrum of injuries, completing the evaluation and providing treatment for children who experience abuse or neglect continues to evolve. The participation of medical personnel with experience in more than the occasional case brings an important point of view to the evaluation.
- Having medical professionals who serve as a point person for the other disciplines involved results in a much more efficient use of everyone's time.
- Gathering information in a uniform manner and appropriate documentation are critical to support the evaluation as well as the criminal justice system.

A study you can access on the web site of the National Children's Alliance documents significant decreased cost to the community for multidisciplinary evaluations when CACs are utilized. This is just the tip of the iceberg. In my personal experience for example the number of times I must cancel days at work to appear in court testimony as well as days scheduled away from my practice to testify only to be cancelled at the last minute and rescheduled have decreased significantly.

Until recently the Lehigh County CAC was located a few blocks from the courthouse in a well designed child friendly stand alone facility. It was a collocation model with case workers, police, a forensic interviewer, child advocate as well as interview and medical examination rooms. The cost of operations were quite modest. My understanding is the chair of our Board of Directors shared the budget with those members of your committee who recently visited our current site. Most personnel in the CAC were budgeted by the agency or discipline represented. LVHN provides the physician and nurse practitioner who staff the medical exam room, provide medical evaluations, attend team meetings and participate in legal proceeding because we see this as part of our mission to serve children. Many educational activities have been developed for very little cost and provided to professionals from surrounding counties as well.

Like many local organizations that serve the needs of children the level of donations from supporters in recent years and the ability of our participating agencies to fund costs resulted in the relocation of the CAC to the county Government Center a few blocks down the street. While it is remarkable what the right people can accomplish in space not designed for the functions provided it is even more remarkable how much is added by having the right space with appropriate size, configuration and environment. Alternatives are being pursued.

Many states provide ongoing funding for Child Advocacy Centers – an excellent investment resulting in more efficient and effective services, decreased costs, improved outcomes and most important demonstrating commitment to our children who are the future of our communities.

I would very much appreciate your consideration and support.