

Practice Made Perfect

Dr. Stewart Jennings Set to Open Internal Medicine/Pediatric Practice in King William County

Dr. Stewart Jennings might be looking for another profession one of these days. “The best physician,” he says, “would be out of a job because fewer and fewer people would be getting sick.” And Jennings would be happy to see that happen. He is passionate about prevention, as evidenced by his commitment to start educating patients as early as possible about the damaging effects of poor health habits, like smoking, lack of exercise and poor eating habits.

He is poised to reach that young audience—along with their parents and grandparents—with the opening of his innovative new practice in King William County, Virginia. As the sole physician working out of Riverside King William Medical Center, Jennings will offer specialty care for patients of all ages. And “all ages” literally means all ages: he is certified by both the American Board of Internal Medicine and the American Board of Pediatrics. Jennings completed a four-year residency tailored to both specialties. When asked about the difference between his training and that of a family medicine physician, Jennings explained that all of the rotations making up his residency were directly linked to either internal medicine or pediatrics. However, the track of many family medicine practitioners often includes rotations in areas such as obstetrics or surgery that may not be included in a family physician’s practice. Jennings studied the entire spectrum of common and serious illnesses in both adult and pediatric patients. His education and experience range from treating chronic diseases like hypertension and diabetes, to acute conditions like ear infections and injuries, to extremely dangerous conditions such as congestive heart failure or dehydration. “I’d love to have a 50/50 practice,” he says, “treating half adult patients and half pediatric patients.”

It was partly this interest in serving a diverse patient population that prompted his transition away from working as a hospitalist at Riverside Tappahannock Hospital. While the hospital admits some pediatric patients, Jennings desires to work with children on a daily basis. He is also looking forward to establishing ongoing relationships with patients, something hospitalists rarely get to do at the hospital. He says, “I miss seeing regular patients that I can follow through their entire plan of care.” With his new practice, set to open January 31, Jennings can literally treat patients for life—from birth, through childhood and into adulthood. His expertise allows him to provide skilled care for patients in all life stages.

Stewart’s own indirect journey to the medical field reflects the range he seeks in his professional life. While serving in the United States Navy, he was prepared for a career in engineering. It seemed like the natural choice considering his interest in learning how things worked and fixing what was broken in an effort to help others. But after volunteering with the Emergency Medical Services in Virginia Beach and working his way through the ranks to the highest level of paramedic, his course changed. Working directly with the people he hoped to help became his true passion. He attended medical

school at Eastern Virginia Medical School and completed his residency at Virginia Commonwealth University – Medical College of Virginia.

His goal of improving lives doesn't seem to know any borders. Jennings has participated in medical missions to Haiti and Uganda, as well as in the United States. He and his wife Laila, a Pediatric Nurse Practitioner who hopes to join Jennings' new practice as it grows, are equally committed to this goal. They are the parents of two children by birth (a four and six-year old) and two children by adoption, a 2-year old girl from Ethiopia and a 5-year old boy from Guatemala. The couple anticipates the arrival of their fifth child, a 4-year old boy from Ethiopia, in early 2011. Stewart admits their full house also had a hand in his decision to move away from the hospitalist position: "I would be leaving the house in the morning when the kids were just getting up, and they'd be asleep by the time I got home."

It makes sense that Stewart teaches his family about values by exhibiting them himself. His dual specialty allows him to witness firsthand the connection between the behaviors of children and the behaviors of their parents. While educating patients is important, he knows that the most valuable tool in teaching children healthy habits is showing them what those habits look like in practice. And the earlier children can learn those lessons, the better. "There are so many diseases that I treat that are preventable with lifestyle changes," Jennings says. While his top recommendations to adults are to quit smoking and to maintain a healthy weight with diet and exercise, his best recommendation for children (and their parents) is to avoid starting unhealthy habits in the first place.

He would tell you all of this, too, if you came in to see him. Jennings helps his patients do everything they can to stay as healthy as possible, even if they suffer from a chronic condition, such as hypertension or diabetes. He obtains a thorough medical history for all new patients, including any past surgeries, illnesses, vaccines or family history of illness. Jennings also takes a complete social history, learning patients' current and previous living situations, use of alcohol or drugs, allergies and prescribed or over-the-counter medications. After a comprehensive examination, he recommends a plan of care, which will always include appropriate preventive measures. You won't leave the office without knowing if it's time for your colonoscopy, mammogram or eye exam or being offered resources to help you maintain a healthier lifestyle. He knows that healthy patients can avoid developing chronic conditions and people already suffering from them can maintain an otherwise healthy life with a few simple steps, one as easy as staying current on vaccinations. "I've been in other countries where people die from vaccine-preventable diseases," Jennings says. "There is nothing more heartbreaking than seeing a child die from the lack of a vaccine that we take for granted in this country." It's a luxury he feels everyone should utilize, from newborns to his oldest patient.

With Jennings' clear message of prevention and lifelong health and his passion for providing specialty care for the whole family, the residents of King William County could find themselves healthy enough to put him right out of a job.

Riverside King William Medical Center is set to open January 31, 2011 and will provide internal medicine and pediatric services. The office is located at the corner of U.S. 360 and Highway 30 in King William County. You can make an appointment now by calling (804) 769-1275.