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Going to the Doctor is Fun!

By Jean Follmer



Dr. Maria Steelman, Basil the Pig & Roxy the Dog Photo Jean Follmer

Four years ago, Dr. Maria Steelman opened Lafayette Pediatrics. She studied medicine at the University of Southern California and found pediatrics was a “perfect fit” during her rotation. As an only child, she wasn’t around many children growing up. With three of her own kids plus the practice, she’s discovered she loves working with children. Dr. Steelman says she “likes the emotional intensity – it gives me a thrill, it fills me up.” Prior to starting her own practice, Dr. Steelman worked with Lafayette Doctor Stephanie Bennett-Strauss for years. Dr. Bennett-Strauss specializes in child development and behavioral pediatrics and Dr. Steelman still consults with her.

As a child she didn’t dream of being a doctor. In fact, some of her early memories of medical care are not pleasant. She has memories of sterile offices. She remembers screaming while her pediatrician cleaned her ears because it hurt so much; yet he didn’t stop. Steelman says “I try to make my office comfortable for kids. If they’re comfortable, it empowers them when they’re older...they’ll be more in touch with their own health when they’re older.” She definitely has comfort down. Her office has pleasing colors, cozy furniture and the feeling of “home”. On occasion, she even brings her pets to visit the office.

The young patients are thrilled to see Basil the pot belly pig and Roxy the dog. She “brought the animals as a trial” and it went over so well that the kids are always asking where they are.

Steelman lets her patients dress up as doctors if they want to during an examination and she’ll “look for butterflies in their ears.” Kids will walk into the office shouting “Dr. Maria, where are you?” She said, “Because I put a little extra effort into the environment, people come here a little happier.” While at a medical conference years back, she attended a pediatric hypnotherapy session. It “made me become more careful with language” and made her recognize the importance of “positive focus language.” Steelman also believes in accessibility, so the office answers its own calls. If you call after hours, Dr. Steelman answers the call herself. She feels parents should be able to reach their pediatrician. She “puts parents in the center and listens to them,” because they often notice the subtle changes in their children.

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Dr. Maria Steelman & patient Hailey Urteaga Photo Jean Follmer