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Priceless Service

James and Amy Rabenstine of Pittsburgh, PA., believe the concierge fee they pay pediatrician Dr. Scott Serbin is money well spent.

When their daughter Olivia was born in May, everything appeared normal, until mom and baby were discharged from the hospital. It was a Saturday afternoon, and within a few hours the Rabenstines knew something wasn't right "She didn't hold her food well," James Rabenstine says. "We called Dr. Serbin, and from then on he kept in constant contact."

Olivia's condition worsened, and when Dr. Serbin called early Sunday for an update, he decided to make a house call. "He walked in with his black bag and a scale, examined her and felt she needed to go to the hospital," James Rabenstine recalls.

Dr. Serbin called Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh to alert them of the infant's impending arrival. After conducting tests, physicians there determined that Olivia had intestinal malrotation, a birth defect involving a malformation of the intestinal tract. Emergency surgery was performed, and today Olivia is in good health.

"With a more traditional doctor, we never would have gotten an appointment on Saturday or Sunday," says Rabenstine. "Dr. Serbin is like a hometown doctor or dentist. We can always call him, and he'll be there."

Dr. Serbin's office, Pinnacle Pediatrics, is the country's first concierge pediatric practice. He converted to a concierge model last year after 20 years in a more traditional setting.

"I became disenchanted," Serbin explains. "Pediatrics is extremely high-volume work, and it is fast-paced. I wanted to do better and enjoy myself again."

He was exploring his options when he saw an article about concierge medicine in the New England Journal of Medicine. "It sounded like Nirvana," he says. He spoke to established concierge physicians and attended conferences sponsored by the SIMPD. "What struck me was how many different approaches to concierge care exist, yet the common goal is [always] to offer greater care."

Before converting his practice Dr. Serbin had 2,500 patients; now he has 250. His patients' parents sign a membership agreement in which he promises to deliver amenities like house calls, immediate appointments, no waiting-room time (he schedules a full hour for each patient) and called-in prescriptions.

"The time I can spend allows me to practice preventive medicine," Dr. Serbin says. "My goal is to have the healthiest practice in the country."