

Katie Johnson: Good morning and welcome to Apple A Day, Lake Region's health and wellness program where we feature news and information to help you live a healthier life. I'm Katie Johnson, your host. My guest today is Dr. Al Magnuson, pediatrician with Lake Region Health Care, who is celebrating retirement, and here to talk with us as he reflects on his career and looks forward to retirement and share some insights and reflections with us. Good morning, Dr. Magnuson.

Dr. Al Magnuson: Good morning.

Katie Johnson: Let's start with your story, where it started. How and when did you decide to get into medicine as a career, and specifically choose pediatrics as your specialty?

Dr. Al Magnuson: I was blessed with wonderful parents. My father was a MD and my mother was actually a peds nurse. When World War II came, she enrolled in the Navy and was on a hospital ship in the Pacific for two years. After that, she became what was probably one of the first Nurse Practitioners working with my father in the office. It is their model of patient care that I've tried to emulate even to this day. Pediatrics was the area I fell into, and I've obviously been happiest with it, so it was an opportunity to provide some health benefit to our most precious gift, and that is our children.

Katie Johnson: When you finished school, what was your next step? What led you to Lake Region Health Care? Or Fergus Falls Medical Group, I suppose it was at that time.

Dr. Al Magnuson: Well, both Larry Eisinger and I took the opportunity to travel around and look at different opportunities, and the opportunity here in Fergus was the best. It was one organization. It was connected to the hospital. There are just other benefits, and Fergus Falls Medical Group gambled and took us both.

Katie Johnson: When did you and Dr. Eisinger get to know each other?

Dr. Al Magnuson: It was in the last year of pediatric residency. He started his residency at Loyola in Chicago, then came to the University of Minnesota in his last year.

Katie Johnson: You have been here for almost 40 years. Why did you stay?

Dr. Al Magnuson: It's a good match. There's so many benefits. I've had great colleagues to work with, especially of course, Larry Eisinger, and now Angie Folstad. The support staff of outstanding nurses, excellent therapists, whether it be speech, physical therapy, occupational therapy. I've watched an anesthetist and an anesthesiologist actually bring a child back from the clutches of death from upper airway obstruction. I was just a member of the team. This is a team.

That's part of the reason probably why in clinic I encourage youth to be involved in extracurricular activities. They learn a lot whether it be hockey, basketball,

cello, the one I play, speech, robotics. They learn lifelong lessons, how to accept success and how to handle failure. I claim that I can see that in employees even when they're working here. It's a team effort.

Katie Johnson: Absolutely. I would imagine the support of your family has been important throughout your career as well.

Dr. Al Magnuson: I would really be remiss if I didn't credit for my wife for all the support that she's given me. She, at times, felt like a single parent when I was on call. She picked up for me when I dropped the ball. There were times when she would attend a swim meet in Duluth on one weekend and Superior on the next in my absence, just supporting our children in their activities.

Eisinger and I tried to cover for each other as much as we could so that we could attend our kid's activities, but it didn't always work out. There was one time when I volunteered to be a parent advisor for both my wife and I to our local 4-H club. I attended not one meeting or not one event that whole year.

Katie Johnson: You have probably seen more than your share of changes throughout the years. What are some of the biggest changes you've seen in pediatrics or children's health specifically throughout your career?

Dr. Al Magnuson: When Larry and I came here, I think we probably scared a few nursery nurses because we practiced some aggressive therapies for infants. Things that we take for granted now were a lot more challenging. Phototherapy for hyperbilirubinemia hadn't been developed, so Larry and I did blood volume exchanges, exchanged transfusions for jaundice, terribly aggressive sounding, but it helped prevent permanent neurologic damage from high bilirubin.

We used to measure blood gases by arterial sticks and now we have oxygen saturation monitors that just fit on your finger. I mean, it's a piece of cake.

Katie Johnson: Technology has been a big part of the change?

Dr. Al Magnuson: That's part of it. Improved antibiotics have come along. Improved immunizations have come. One example, particularly, is haemophilus, which is a bacterial that causes many types of infections, but one in particular is haemophilus meningitis, which Larry and I saw 12 times a year here at Fergus when we started. The vaccine came along about 25, maybe 30 years ago, and since then we haven't seen haemophilus meningitis, not one per year, but not one. It also eradicated a very serious infection called epiglottitis.

So I think it's important for people to get that information, and in 40 years, I can't say that I have seen a significant consequence from immunizations. Many things have been incriminated and blamed on immunizations. For instance, SIDS was blamed on pertussis. It happens that pertussis was given at four months,

and the peak incidence of SIDS was at four months, so the research disproved that.

Language delay and autism for MMR vaccines, many research studies have disproven that, and in fact, the original author recanted his whole thesis because his research was flawed, so immunizations make a great difference. It's not a reward. You don't get a reward for things that you prevent, like wearing your seatbelt, whatever. It's real.

Katie Johnson: I'm sure that challenging some of those myths is one of the things that you've faced. What have been some of the other biggest challenges through the years in this career?

Dr. Al Magnuson: I think you've got me there. Call has been a challenge, and I think that the community needs to recognize those people that still take call on a regular basis, to have to come in at night. It takes its toll.

Katie Johnson: Not only just at night, just the fact that it's at a drop of a hat, and you always have to be alert and available.

Dr. Al Magnuson: Yeah, you never know what's coming.

Katie Johnson: How about what's been most rewarding? I can only imagine, pediatrics is an especially rewarding area of medicine. Can you even encapsulate most rewarding?

Dr. Al Magnuson: Well, it's a hug. It's a smile. It's play hide and seek at Fleet Farm in the clothing department. It's a little ankle biter hugging you around the leg. It's just a smile and being able to see success.

Katie Johnson: You've really touched a lot of lives over the course of your career. As you think about a younger generation that might be considering a career in healthcare or in pediatrics specifically, do you have any advice you'd share with that group of people?

Dr. Al Magnuson: Well, it's particularly rewarding emotionally. It's a calling. If that seems to be a match for you, go for it.

Katie Johnson: How about advice for parents of young children today who want to guard their health, who want to do the best for their children's health, what do you tell them?

Dr. Al Magnuson: What I tell them is that medicine has changed terrifically. We were trained to treat meningitis. Now we treat mental health. The blame goes in many areas, 24-hour news cycle, shootings, school shootings, that's in the face of children all the time, but certainly electronics has a big role. Children are consciously wary and become anxious, even depressed over what somebody else is saying about

them on Instagram, Snapchat, or Facebook, and they can't leave it alone because they really have to see what they're saying. That's a real stress for children, and so I would advise parents to monitor what they're viewing, who they're talking to, what's the mode that they're communicating with, and control it.

Also, they have these kids in their life for about 17 years, and it goes pretty quickly. They are constantly modeling behavior. There's a poem out there called Children Learn What They Live. Siri can find it for you, Google. They do. When people say, well Johnnie or Susie is just a chip off the old block, well they are because their parents have been modeling their behaviors or values.

There's no Master's Degree in parenting, but you have to be aware that you're modeling behaviors and values and spend your time talking to your children with quality time about how you treat your spouse, what's right and wrong, what's good communication behavior, what's bad behavior. I see parents walking out in the clinic parking lot with one hand on their child and the other hand on their phone in their ear. You know what they're talking about isn't going to make any difference in five to ten years, but what you're talking about with that child is going to make a big difference.

Those are the things that I'd like to recommend. I'd recommend that they wear their seat belts 'cause their children are going to model them. I give handouts on distracted driving because that's the third most common cause of death in automobile accidents followed only by alcohol and speed, and on a two-lane road, you have to drive defensively. We're killing good people. All those things are important.

I'd also recommend locking up firearms or using gun cases. There's too much video gaming, M17 videos where you're rewarded for killing somebody else, especially a police officer. That behavior can get modeled, and so we have to control it.

Katie Johnson: Looking forward to your retirement.....What are you planning to do? What are you looking forward to enjoying with all this new time on your hands?

Dr. Al Magnuson: Charles Krauthammer said that he was in remission from psychiatry, so I think I'm going to be in remission. I don't anticipate any relapse, but I have grandchildren. I'd like to follow their activities, things that I haven't done for a long time. Not a big traveler, but in the United States, yes. I'm sure other things will come along.

Katie Johnson: You're leaving the department in good hands though. You mentioned Dr. Angie Folstad, Amy Fisher, and a couple of new pediatricians coming in, so parents have some great resources even though they don't have you.

Dr. Al Magnuson: Absolutely. Don't forget Mark Vukonich. He is a family practitioner, but he had excellent training in pediatrics, in fact covers our call, and yes, we have one pediatrician coming in August.

Katie Johnson: Anything else you want to leave with our listeners and with our community who has come to know and love you as the care provider for their children over the past 40 years?

Dr. Al Magnuson: I think you've covered the questions. I don't think that I've given all the answers, but it's been a great ride. I'm very thankful for having the opportunity to do it.

Katie Johnson: We are very grateful to you for the time, the care, the concern, the heart, and the soul that you've given to this organization, and as I said, to children and their families throughout the years. Dr. Al Magnuson, thanks for 40 years of wonderful care.

Dr. Al Magnuson: Thank you very much.

Katie Johnson: Dr. Al Magnuson and Katie Johnson on Apple A Day, today wishing Dr. Magnuson the best in his retirement and thanking him for his years of service and reminding you there's so much to do here. Stay healthy for it. Have a great day.