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The **SETON** Healthcare Network

# Your Partner in Good Health

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*The International Health and Travel Center for Families at Children's Hospital of Austin offers pre-adoption services, as well as travel counseling and vaccinations to prospective adoptive parents of children from other parts of the world. (L to R) Vilma Casamiro, CMA; Dr. Sarmistha Hauger; Dr. Marisol Fernandez; LaDrena January, RN; and Jennifer Murray, RN, MSN, are on staff at the Center.*

## Evaluation of the Internationally Adopted Child

*By Marisol Fernandez, MD, and Jennifer Murray, RN, MSN, 'Specially for Children*

**A**doption has become a common and more accepted situation in the modern era. In many cases adoption is considered not only by couples unable to conceive, but also by those with children of their own, who generously wish to offer a better opportunity to children in need.

This time-consuming and emotional process becomes even more difficult when considering international adoption.

There are many other variables at play, including the legal aspects of immigration and naturalization, the difficulty of limited direct communication with parties involved, economic constraints and the complexities of traveling overseas. Parents considering international adoption should always obtain pre-travel advice regarding required and recommended vaccinations, as well as region-specific prophylaxis for all family members traveling.

Approximately 15,000 - 20,000 internationally adopted children come to the United States every year. The majority of these children come from Asia, Central/South America

and Eastern Europe.

In many cities, pediatric infectious diseases specialists offer pre- and post-adoption counseling and evaluation to facilitate this process for clinicians and families. Children adopted abroad are at risk for many different illnesses depending on their country of origin. Pediatricians should become familiar with the area-specific risk for disease in these children and how to evaluate them once they arrive in the U.S., if they constitute a significant portion of their practice. For instance, it is well-known that children adopted from Russia are more likely to have a history of prematurity, maternal substance abuse (including

alcoholism) and to have been institutionalized. Children adopted from China are also more likely to have been institutionalized and are generally older at the time of adoption.

During pre-adoption consultation, the clinician should review all available medical records, videotapes and photographs with parents. If the prospective parents have seen and interacted with the child first-hand, their impressions can be a very valuable tool in the pre-adoption process. It is very important to evaluate parental expectations and to discuss any concerns that may have arisen while reviewing available data.

Once the child has arrived in the U.S., a timely and complete evaluation should be undertaken, despite documentation of medical examinations performed overseas. Most adopted children are healthy, but when problems occur, they should be identified quickly and addressed in a timely manner.

The initial evaluation should take place within two weeks of arrival, unless the child has an acute illness at that time. If this is the case, or if the parents notice unexpected symptoms or behaviors, the child should be evaluated immediately. Evaluation should include basic development, growth and nutrition and hearing and vision screenings, as well as evaluation for specific diseases (see Table 1). Infectious diseases account for the most common health problems of international adoptees. Certain diseases can greatly impact the adoptive family and close social circle of the child, so it is critical that a comprehensive

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## International Health and Travel Center

### *Innovative New Center Opens at Children's*

'Specially for Children, the largest group of multidisciplinary medical sub-specialists for children in Central Texas, recently opened a new International Health and Travel Center for Families at Children's Hospital of Austin. The group is committed to treating children of all ages who have serious illness or complex medical conditions.

The Center, located on the second floor of the hospital, offers families medical assistance when they are planning to adopt internationally. The counseling includes screening of medical records, videos, travel counseling and vaccinations, comprehensive medical evaluation within two weeks of when the child arrives in the United States, social work and nutritional consultation and referral to regional pediatrician and family practitioners for ongoing primary care. In addition, referrals are available for specialty care, neuro-development, ophthalmologic and auditory services.

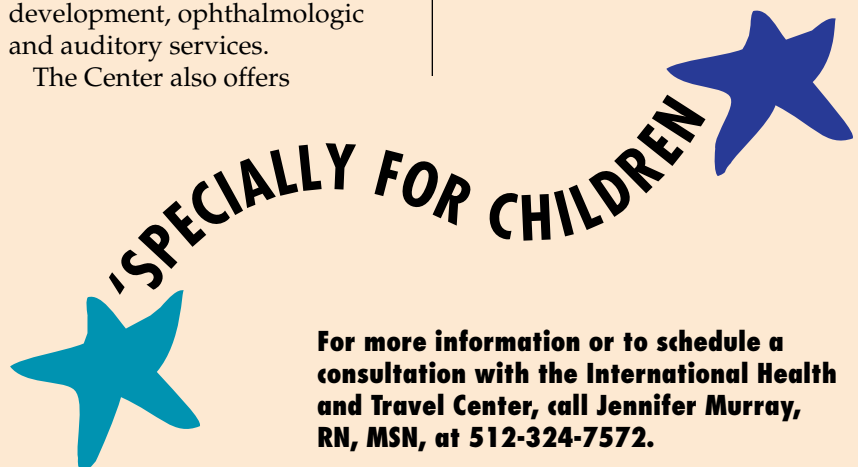
The Center also offers

consultations for international travel for individuals and families planning travel abroad, including necessary vaccinations and prescriptions.

"Adopting a child is a life-changing event with many emotional, physical and financial challenges," says Sarmistha B. Hauger, MD, Pediatric Infectious Diseases Specialist. "We hope to guide families in this important undertaking, giving them the knowledge they need to make the most informed decisions and providing a nurturing environment during this arduous process."

"We want to give families guidance regarding the potential benefits and problems of adopting internationally and ensuring appropriate follow-up for their new child once they have returned to the U.S.," says Marisol Fernandez, MD, Pediatric Infectious Diseases Specialist.

In addition to this Center, 'Specially For Children offers Pediatric Gastroenterology, Neurology, Nephrology, Endocrinology, Infectious Diseases, Genetics, Hematology-Oncology, Dialysis and Infusion Services.



**For more information or to schedule a consultation with the International Health and Travel Center, call Jennifer Murray, RN, MSN, at 512-324-7572.**

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medical assessment is done, as some of these illnesses have an asymptomatic presentation.

Taking into account country of origin of the child will guide this expanded evaluation. Parents should be counseled regarding implications of a positive result before any test is performed.

Internationally adopted children often have documentation of immunization; however, the reliability of the documentation cannot always be assured. This is particularly true for children adopted from orphanages. Clinicians must either prove the immunization record by requesting antibody levels to immunizing antigens or disregard the immunization record and revaccinate the

child.

The process of adopting a child from outside the U.S. can be frustrating, confusing and difficult, as well as extremely rewarding to families who are successful. As more families consider this option, it is critical that primary care providers stay informed and educated about the unique challenges this entails. The process involves many layers of evaluation and consultation with the family, which may be impractical in the pediatrician's office, but is well suited to pediatric infectious diseases specialists. By referring to local specialists who offer these services, families considering and participating in international adoption will have the knowledge and confidence to make the best decisions possible.

## Make a Referral to the Heritage Program



**T**he Heritage Program for Senior Adults

is one of several mental health outpatient programs housed at Seton Shoal Creek. The intensive outpatient program treats persons who suffer from psychiatric, emotional or behavioral disorders. The program is offered Monday through Friday with a multidisciplinary treatment team consisting of therapists, program psychiatrist, program nurse and mental health technicians.

### Program components include:

- Group/family/individual therapy
- Coping/positive living skills
- Grief and loss resolution
- Education
- Medication management
- Health and wellness training
- Daily living skills
- Nutritional information
- Stress management
- Assertiveness training
- Communication skills
- Lunch and snacks

Referrals to the program can be made by physicians, health-care professionals, human service agencies, clergy and/or concerned family members or friends. Heritage provides a clinical evaluation at no cost to determine the need for treatment. Medicare and most private insurance plans cover services. For more information, call 324-2068.

**TABLE 1: Initial Evaluation of Internationally Adopted Children**

- Medical evaluation
  - Physical exam
  - Hearing/Vision screen
  - Developmental assessment
  - Psychological evaluation
- Laboratory evaluation
- Complete blood count
- Lead level
- Syphilis serology (RPR)
- HIV testing
- Hepatitis B surface antigen
- Hepatitis C serology (for certain group of children)
- Stool for ova and parasites
- G6PD (for certain group of children)
- Other tests
- Tuberculin Skin Test (PPD)