

It Takes A Special Surgeon

by Amanda McAlpin

No parent wants their baby to undergo surgery, but if the need arises, Dr. Keith Player, a General Surgeon with Pee Dee Surgical Group, is available to ease their minds. Over the years, Dr. Player has taken a keen interest in pediatric surgical cases. During medical school, he was encouraged by his peers to pursue pediatrics due to his lively and compassionate personality. Today, he performs the majority of pediatric cases that are referred to Pee Dee Surgical Group.

One common condition that Dr. Player treats in infants is pyloric stenosis, a narrowing of the pylorus, which is the part of the stomach that leads into the small intestines. This narrowing occurs because the muscle around the pylorus has grown too large and tight and does not allow the stomach to empty. This forces the stomach to continue filling up with formula or breast milk until the baby experiences continued forceful vomiting. Fortunately, this condition is completely correctible with surgery.

“Pyloric stenosis occurs in children between the ages of four weeks and eight weeks, boys more commonly than girls. A child is born, does great at home, reaches one month old and begins spitting up excessively. Usually, the pediatrician will instruct the parents to change the formula or the amount the child is being fed,” said Dr. Player. “Ultimately, if the vomiting continues to get worse regardless of the treatments, chances are, the baby has pyloric stenosis.”

If the condition goes without

treatment for too long, the child will begin to experience dehydration and possible weight loss. Signs of dehydration include lack of activity, irritability, and the absence of urination and bowel movements.

“It is not uncommon to take an infant with pyloric stenosis to the pediatrician twice in one week’s time and notice a several ounce weight loss between the first visit and the second visit,” stated Dr. Player.

An abdominal ultrasound is the preferred method of diagnosis because it is a non-invasive test that measures the length and width of the pylorus. Normally, Dr. Player operates based solely on the ultrasound results.

Once pyloric stenosis has been diagnosed, the baby is admitted into the McLeod Children’s Hospital. Upon arrival, blood work is taken and intravenous fluids are administered. “A child must be adequately hydrated before putting them to sleep in order to minimize the possibilities for anesthesia complications. If the

child’s vomiting has been going on for four or more days, the likelihood of dehydration is fairly high. In cases such as this additional fluids may be necessary prior to surgery,” explained Dr. Player.

The operation Dr. Player performs is called a pyloromyotomy, which is a procedure where an incision is made to the muscle around the pyloric valve, allowing the stomach to empty into the small intestines.

Forde Franklin Emerson was treated for pyloric stenosis by Dr. Player in late 2005. Forde Franklin is the youngest son of Dr. Gary Emerson, an Obstetrics and Gynecology physician with McLeod OB/GYN Associates, and Dr. Mary Allyson Emerson, a Family Medicine physician with Family Medicine Associates of Florence.

“Forde Franklin was eight-and-a-half weeks old when symptoms arose,” said Dr. Mary Allyson Emerson. “Throughout the following week and

The Emersons: Hale, Wyatt, Mary Anna, Dr. Gary Emerson of McLeod OB/GYN Associates, Dr. Mary Allyson Emerson of Family Medicine Associates of Florence, and Forde Franklin.



a half, he would forcefully vomit after every meal. At first, we thought it was the formula, so we tried soy milk. Then, we thought he was suffering from reflux, so we tried a thicker formula. No matter what we tried, the vomiting remained consistent and progressive.”

Forde Franklin was diagnosed with pyloric stenosis by an abdominal ultrasound on Monday morning, November 21, 2005. “The radiologist told us it was the largest mass that he had ever seen,” explained Dr. Emerson. “It was suggested to us to take him to the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) in Charleston for laparoscopic surgery, but we knew that Dr. Player was highly experienced in pediatric surgery and that he could treat our baby right here in Florence.”

Following the radiology report, Forde Franklin was immediately admitted to the

McLeod Children’s Hospital where IVs were administered and he was prepped for surgery. That evening, Dr. Player performed a pyloromyotomy on the Emerson’s baby, which lasted 45 minutes.

“This is one of the more rewarding surgeries I perform because I’m able to witness an almost immediate improvement in the child’s condition,” added Dr. Player.

Forde Franklin stayed in the McLeod Children’s Hospital for a day and a half. During that time, he was fed small ounces of formula, which increased with his tolerance. He quickly regained his strength and appetite and was released on Wednesday, November 23, just in time for Thanksgiving.

Forde Franklin is now an active and healthy eighteen-month-old little boy whose only sign of pyloric stenosis is a tiny, barely visible scar near his belly button.

“There is no need for any parent to take their child to

Charleston, Columbia, or Charlotte for surgery when Dr. Player can treat them here at McLeod,” said Dr. Emerson.

“He was compassionate to our child and to us. He made us feel comfortable and relaxed from the moment he took on Forde Franklin’s case. That is so important to parents of a child who is about to undergo surgery.”

“With pediatrics, you are treating the parents as much as you are treating the child,” said Dr. Player. “It’s necessary to be patient with them – you cannot just rush into the room and say, ‘we have to do this, this, and this,’ and then rush out. You have to slowly go over the entire procedure with them, calm their fears, and make certain they are comfortable with what is about to happen to their child.”

Dr. Player’s consideration of parents’ fears and concerns, compassion with his patients, and excellent outcomes are what make him an outstanding pediatric surgeon, attest many families like the Emerson’s who were pleased with the special care he provided to their whole family.



Dr. Keith Player (left) was happy to see Forde Franklin and his mom, Dr. Mary Allyson Emerson, during a recent visit.

For more information on pyloric stenosis surgery, visit www.peedeesurgical.com