Today’s piece was prepared by Cate Otten, MD and is based on an article from the LA Times entitled “Aggressive Children Could Have Worse Health As Adults” <http://www.latimes.com/health/boostershots/la-heb-childhood-aggression-health-20111114,0,4157506.story>.

The article reports on a study by the Canadian Medical Association Journal entitled “Childhood aggression, withdrawal and likeability, and the use of health care later: a longitudinal study” <http://www.cmaj.ca/content/early/2011/11/14/cmaj.091830.full.pdf+html?sid=aae36265-5b5d-43a1-b5cc-22376591b981>.

The LA Times article discussed a prospective study of children with difficult behaviors and their subsequent healthcare. The research study identified children by asking their peers about their level of aggression, sociable behavior, or likeability. Researchers then identified their utilization of health care through their adult medical records. The study determined that children who were rated to have difficult behavior by their peers were more likely to visit doctors, emergency departments, subspecialists, and dentists later in life. However, the study did not discriminate visits for injuries versus preventative health. Additionally, no mention was given to whether the “aggressive” children also had co-morbid conditions like ADHD, autism spectrum disorders, or hearing deficits that might all necessitate higher use of health care.

The LA Times article reports that the “aggressive” children had worse health as adults, but also implied causality. The article postulated that the children may engage in more risky behaviors due to poor impulse control. The article was helpful in highlighting that children with behavioral problems might need better preventative health and help from their pediatrician and subspecialists. However, parents should also be aware that “aggressive” behavior *should* come with more utilization of health care to help determine whether any co-morbid health issues are the cause. Depending on the behavior, children may need evaluations for learning disabilities, ADHD, autism, or psychosocial variables including abuse and depression. While a child’s aggressive or impulsive behavior might be the cause of more ER visits, the behavior may also disrupt the child’s education or indicate an underlying disorder like ADHD. Parents should be made aware that difficult behavior in their child may associate with poorer adult health without necessarily causing poorer health.

Resources for parents on children’s behavior can be accessed below:

American Academy of Pediatrics: Healthy Children. *The site discusses disruptive behaviors and their many possible causes and encourages evaluation and management*: <http://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/pages/Disruptive-Behavior-Disorders.aspx>

Parenting Skills Support *Offers a number of links to websites directed to parents that focus on “positive parenting” strategies & supports.*

<http://depts.washington.edu/dbpeds>, Select ‘Resources’, then ‘Parenting Skills Support’

And that’s today’s Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics: IN THE NEWS!