

Rx for fun It's playtime at the pediatrician's. By **Nicole Caccavo Kear**



The office of my childhood pediatrician in Brooklyn Heights featured two things of interest to kids: a Norman Rockwell print of a boy readying to get a shot, and a basket of lollipops.

Today, though, there's a chance you might mistake a pediatrician's office for a play space. When my three-year-old daughter and I

passed the new branch of Tribeca Pediatrics in Park Slope a few weeks ago, she darted in thinking it was a toy shop. A storefront with custom-made furniture, shelves lined with Haba toys and a coin-op kiddie ride out front—who could blame her?

But that gear is just the beginning. At Perfect Smiles Orthodontics on the Upper

West Side, children can play *Guitar Hero* in the waiting room and watch their favorite shows on video goggles while being treated in a massage chair. "Kids never have to be separated from *SpongeBob*," jokes Olga Bukholts, DDS, the practice's director.

Whether the waiting room has a PlayStation isn't the most important factor when selecting a provider for your tyke, but the amenities are enticing. They contribute to a welcoming office environment where kids feel relaxed, and distract from the matter at hand. Fran Shapiro chose Manhattan Pediatric Dental Group on the Upper East Side based on her pediatrician's referral, but its fringe benefits—video games,

themed exam rooms and a "Tooth Fairy House" filled with kid-pleasing loot—factor into why she continues to schlep her girls uptown from Gramercy Park.

Doctors who offer such bonuses say that appeasing little ones during their visit isn't just convenient; it improves the quality of their medical care. "They're more likely to follow your directions about brushing their teeth or elastics if they're happy," Dr. Bukholts says. Michel Cohen, M.D., founder of Tribeca Pediatrics, agrees: "So much of what we do revolves around observation and communication," he explains. "When parents and kids are at ease, you get a better assessment of a situation that could have been masked by stress."

Before I pulled her away kicking and screaming, my daughter did seem pretty at ease playing with the wooden fire station in the Tribeca Pediatrics waiting room. I'm not saying we're going to ditch our beloved pediatrician and his somewhat Spartan office, but I happened to grab a business card on the way out.