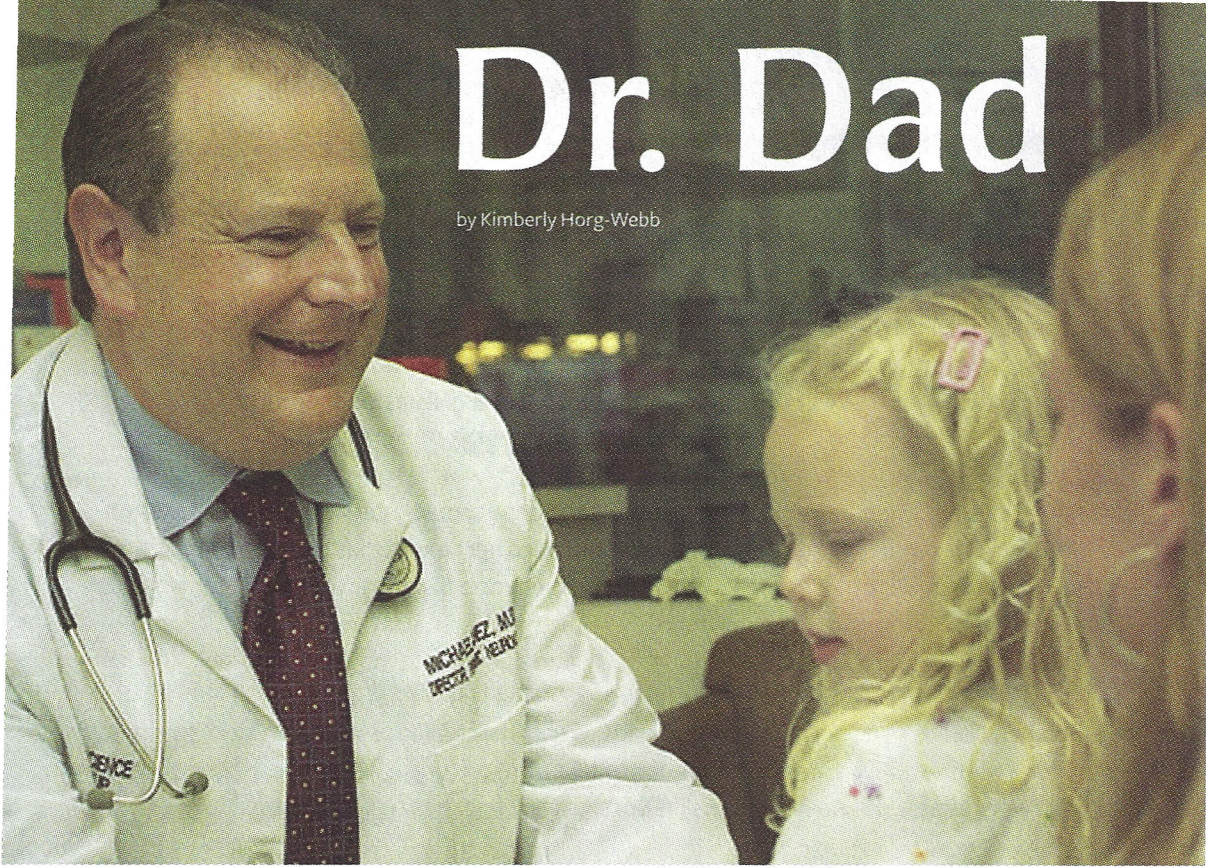


Dr. Dad

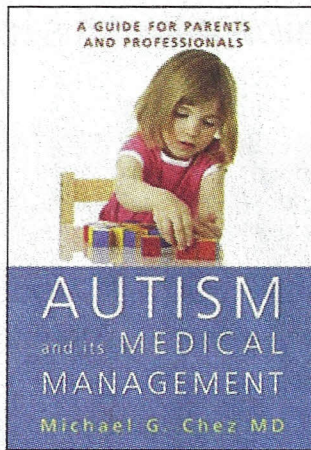
by Kimberly Horg-Webb



For Michael Chez and his wife, Dawn, the professional is personal

Michael Chez has almost 20 years' experience in epilepsy and autism research. He left Chicago just a couple of years ago to become Director of Pediatric Neurology for Sutter Medical Center's Neuroscience Institute and Children's Center in Sacramento. He's also written a book, *Autism and Its Medical Management*, and volunteers as an Associate Professor in Neurology at UC Davis Medical School. His expertise benefits colleagues and patients on a daily basis, but many might be surprised to learn how much it helps at home too.

Michael and Dawn Chez have four daughters, ranging in age from 19 to 15. Their 18-year-old, Alison, has autism and had epilepsy; 16-year-old Rebecca has Landau-Kleffner Syndrome, a form of epilepsy which affects her language and mimics autism.



Dr. Michael G. Chez is the author of *Autism and Its Medical Management: A Guide for Parents and Professionals* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2008).

Michael says caring for his own kids with ASD and epilepsy has made him a better doctor. "I am definitely affected by the fact that I have children with illnesses," he says. "I know what I have to tell other parents." Of course, he wishes it didn't have to come at the cost of having sick kids.

Alison's birth was difficult; she was born bruised and in need of oxygen. Dawn's motherly instincts told her then that her daughter was going to have problems later on in life. "It took me 18 months and three pediatricians to find someone to listen," she says. "She was very verbal and social, so it made it more difficult to get someone to see through that to the real problems."

Alison received behavioral, speech, occupational, and medical therapy early on. She still has many problems, but Michael says it would have been worse if her epilepsy and autism were not managed from the start.

Rebecca has also benefited from early intervention. At 16 years old, she has learning issues and faces limitations due to her epilepsy, but she can live a fairly normal life and she is doing well thanks to aggressive early seizure management.

Dawn says having a child with epilepsy and autism has changed every aspect of her

life. She became an EEG technician because she wanted parents to under-

stand the importance of developmental screening. She adds that her experience as a mom definitely helps in her work. "When the parent understands that I have two kids with seizures and that I know how they feel, they relax, the kids relax, and we get it done."

Alison's needs dictate Dawn's day-to-day schedule. Mentally and emotionally, Alison has much in common with five-year-olds, but at 5'8" and 18-years-old, finding playmates is difficult. Dawn says most parents are scared of her at the park or public pools. "Some days she is sad and asks me where her friends are," mom says. "It is heartbreaking. Even after all these years, it still hurts to have people stare at her."

"Having a child with autism is very isolating," says Dawn. Both she and Michael recommend parents join a support group. "As a family we are trying to live as normal a life as we can."

"I am glad I can work with the families I meet," says Dr. Chez. "It inspires me to try harder to help. I want them to be a partner with all their doctors and help teach others—the way my kids have helped teach me and my family." 🌻