



## AAP Member Spotlight



### **Charlotte Cowan, MD FAAP**

#### **Two Roads Diverged: The Path from Pediatrics to Publishing**

When Dr. Charlotte Cowan left practice to write children's books, she chose the road less traveled. One might fairly ask what prompted her decision.

Her days at Boston's Mass General Hospital for Children were frenetic, like those of pediatricians everywhere, filled from early morning until evening: with babies and children, patients in the office and the hospital, staff meetings, phone calls and emails from parents and colleagues, endless paperwork, and demands for better documentation. It was a life of chaos and commitment, a life of passion difficult to sustain.

Her practice at the MGH was refreshingly diverse. Dr. Cowan had patients from all over the world, from India, China, France, Poland, Japan, Ethiopia and Algeria. She had well educated families and disorganized families from shelters, too.

Regardless of background, these families were universally concerned about their children, eager to learn about a child's illness or developmental stage. Frequently, parents called--or emailed. Sophisticated parents searched the web, making their own diagnoses and coming in only to confirm the "web" care they had already given.

Although their styles (and cultures) differed significantly, all of these parents were seeking health information. Their insistence on education was admirable, appropriate—and impossible to fulfill given the time constraints of the day. Dr. Cowan grew frustrated by the gap between the care she wanted to deliver and the care she had time to give.

Dr. Cowan considered alternatives to practice. She wanted not only to honor her parents' needs for advice but also to streamline telephone and office visits, rendering them both more fruitful and efficient; she hoped to decrease parental demand for unnecessary medications and emergency room visits. With a background in English, Dr. Cowan turned to books—picture books that could reach families at home and in pediatric offices, books that could entertain, educate and comfort both parent and child.

Inherently child focused, picture books are read and reread: repetition yields important learning. Picture books are grammatically simple, accessible to parents with limited educations or for whom English is a second language. Finally, books read to a sick child provide comfort even as they foster literacy.

Each story chronicles an illness from onset to resolution, offers sage advice from a pediatrician hippopotamus, Dr. Hippocrates, and includes a separate Parents' Guide. The Parents' Guide answers questions like: "How can I keep my child comfortable at home?" and "When should I call the doctor?" Dr. Cowan started her Dr. Hippo Series with acute infectious illnesses (otitis media, fever, colds, sore throat, and gastroenteritis) because they affect millions of children annually.

Dr. Cowan has four titles out and a fifth (*The Moose with Loose Poops*) on its way. Her titles have won multiple parenting awards, most recently the 2008 Mom's Choice Award. But the response within the medical community has been even more gratifying: pediatricians across the country have enthusiastically offered their help; and pediatric offices piloting the books have yielded exceptionally positive data.

The CDC invites Dr. Cowan to their annual Get Smart: Know When Antibiotics Work conference because her books argue for the judicious use of antibiotics. Her first title, *The Little Elephant with the Big Earache*, has been used in a dozen states in their respective Antibiotic Awareness campaigns; the program in Indiana—which used *The Little Elephant* in libraries-- won the 2006 CDC National Award for Innovation in Antibiotic Education!

Dr. Cowan's path—like that of Robert Frost—is indeed making a difference. Her stories are well on their way to comforting sick children, improving health care through education, and cutting costs by changing parental behavior. Hooray for Dr. Hippo!

For more information about Dr. Cowan's books, please visit [www.drhippo.com](http://www.drhippo.com).

-----

To request a review copy of **The Moose with Loose Poops**, to arrange an interview with Dr. Cowan, to receive art electronically, or for any additional information, please contact Kate Bandos at KSB Promotions: 800-304-3269 or 616-676-0758 • [kate@ksbpromotions.com](mailto:kate@ksbpromotions.com)