



Modern Medicine

The East Bay's Best Doctors Put Patient Care First

BY LINDA CHILDERS PHOTOGRAPHY FRANK GAGLIONE

When you're looking for a new doctor or you need to help a family member find a physician in a specific specialty area, where do you turn?

Our list, provided annually by Best Doctors Inc. (www.bestdoctors.com), can help make the process easier. Since 1989, Best Doctors, founded by two Harvard physicians, has conducted the largest peer-to-peer survey of the medical profession asking physicians, "If you or a loved one needed a doctor in your specialty, to whom would you refer them?" Only doctors identified by their peers as "best doctors" in previous years receive the survey. In addition, the staff of Best Doctors reviews each physician

nominee for current licensure, board certification and any malpractice incidents, as well as their specific expertise including special research and published work. The doctors are chosen not just for their resumes, but for their continued clinical prowess and their ever-important interpersonal skills.

This year, we chose five outstanding physicians, including two Oakland natives, to profile from the list of 264 doctors identified by Best Doctors Inc. Each physician is a recognized leader in his or her field. Spanning a wide variety of specialties including pediatrics, dermatology and neurology, this list of local physicians is a guide to some of the finest medical care the East Bay has to offer. →



Pamela Simms-Mackey
*Pediatrician and Associate Director of Graduate
Medical Education*
Children's Hospital & Research Center, Oakland

Even as a young girl growing up in Oakland, Simms-Mackey, 43, knew she wanted to be a doctor. Today the mother of two young children, ages 8 and 11, maintains a medical practice where she sees children from birth to age 21. A graduate of Stanford University, Simms-Mackey attended medical school at the University of California Los Angeles, served her internship, residency and chief residency at Children's Hospital & Research Center Oakland, and has worked as an attending physician there since 1998. She is

also the associate medical education director at Children's where she oversees the hospital's 83 pediatric residents, 30 interns and four chief residents, ensuring they receive exemplary training in the field of pediatric medicine. An avid cardio kickboxer, Simms-Mackey lives in Oakland with her husband and family.

When did you first decide to pursue a career in medicine?

I've always wanted to be a pediatrician. When I ran for student body president at Montera Middle School, I was quoted in the school newspaper. My mom worked in child development, and my dad's a retired urologist, so in many ways, my career is a combination of both of their jobs. My sister, Erin

Simms-Edwards, is a pediatric ENT doctor in Berkeley. I chose my specialty area because I've always liked children. I'm the person who isn't scared to sit next to the baby on a long airplane flight, or who can be found playing with the kids at a birthday party. When I was in high school at Skyline High, I remember driving by Children's Hospital Oakland and thinking, "I want to work there some day!"

What is the most challenging aspect of your job?

Right now, given the state's current financial crisis, it's ensuring that our patients get the quality care they deserve, even if they can't afford it. A large majority of the patients we see in our outpatient clinic are hardworking families who have lost their medical insurance as a result of job layoffs or not being able to afford insurance premiums. A lot of people don't realize how the recession is affecting children, too, both financially and emotionally.

How has your practice changed over the years?

We are definitely diagnosing asthma more and seeing more cases of childhood obesity. Many of our patients are overweight at a much younger age than when I first became a doctor. Kids aren't exercising as much, due to the cutback in physical education requirements at the middle and high school level, and many of their parents can't afford to pay for sports leagues or extracurricular physical activities. As a result, we're seeing more kids diagnosed with medical conditions that we didn't used to see until middle age, including type 2 diabetes, sleep apnea, high blood pressure and elevated cholesterol.

What advances have you seen in pediatric care?

We don't see nearly as many cases of chicken-pox or bacterial meningitis that I saw during my residency, thanks to the effective vaccines we now have for many of these conditions. Medicine has also made great strides in the management of childhood asthma and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. We are now able to diagnose children with these conditions at a younger age and to offer them better treatment options. We also can treat many pediatric conditions, such as urinary tract infections in young children on an outpatient basis with antibiotics rather than admitting them to the hospital as we did years ago.

What do you like best about your job?

I really enjoy the interaction I have with patients and their families. I've met many of my patients as newborns and continued to be a part of their lives until they become adults. I've received e-mails from some of my former patients who are now away at college, thanking me for the care I provided, and I'm now starting to see the children and in some cases, the grandchildren, of my former patients. →