

The South Park doctor will see you now



Dr. Tara Zandvliet opened South Park Doctor as a neighborhood remedy for those frustrated with standard health care options. Photo by Michael Oletta.

Right: Seven-year-old Reese Palmer gets her blood pressure checked by Dr. Zandvliet. Photo by Michael Oletta.



By Janine Rojas

Ahh, just what the doctor ordered. Hot chicken soup with lemon. That was one of Dr. Tara Zandvliet's recommendations for 9-year-old Spencer Palmer — along with thyme steam therapy, Robitussin and plenty of rest. No antibiotics, since Spencer's bronchitis was of the viral variety. No waiting, either, even though it was a Sunday. And no trip to urgent care, because the doctor rode her bike to Spencer's house.

Zandvliet is known as the "South Park Doctor," for her practice of that name located at 2991 Kalmia St. Maintaining an independent office enables her to provide the kind of personalized care not found within today's bureaucratic health system. As a result, she does not directly bill insurance companies and has no staff. Rates are affordable. A simple urgent care exam with lab tests, for instance, is \$60. Health insurance is not

required, though may be used to if desired. Diagnoses and treatment plan are not influenced by insurance coverage, but rather what's best for the patient, including focusing on prevention.

She views people as individuals, rather than as "numbers" (as might doctors who depend on high volumes of appointments to generate revenue). In such fast-paced settings, visits are limited to five minutes, whereas Zandvliet spends 20 to 40 minutes with most patients, up to an hour and a half with others. Plus, she sees patients right away, rather than setting appointments a month or so out.

Zandvliet received her M.D. from New York Medical College. She is board certified in internal medicine and in pediatrics. Throughout her career, Zandvliet witnessed first-hand the frustrations of contemporary health care, seeing ample room for improvement. After years of working in hospitals, community clinics and other conventional health care settings, she decided to do things her own way.

Zandvliet opened South Park Doctor (southparkdoctor.com) in October, debuting her 200-square-foot space during the South Park Walkabout. The converted granny flat is homey and comforting, like the doctor herself. As you enter the room, Zandvliet's roll-top desk is on the left, with her framed medical diploma hanging above. Further back are a physicians scale and exam table with Dr. Seuss-themed cover tissue. Furnishings also include a curio cabinet for medical supplies, a wooden case holding lab test kits (for providing on-the-spot answers)

— and a credenza displaying fliers promoting neighborhood businesses ranging from a baby sign language tutor to an acupuncture specialist.

Helping owners of the many small mom-and-pop businesses in the South Park area is important to Zandvliet, especially since entrepreneurs often lack access to health insurance. She also enjoys the neighborly appeal of her job.

"I love the idea running into Rebecca's Coffee House, seeing a patient, and saying 'Hey, how's it going? How are the kids, how was the pot luck — and by the way, are you feeling better?'" explains Zandvliet.

She likens herself to an old-fashioned country doctor, even making the occasional house call. Just without the horse and buggy or black bag (she prefers her bicycle panniers). Such was the case when she treated Spencer at his home, pedaling down the street from the one Zandvliet shares with her husband and two children. The in-person exam wasn't only for mutual geographic convenience, but also to avoid having Spencer spend hours exposed to other sick children at an ER or urgent care facility.

Spencer's mother, Jill, had called Zandvliet expressing concern over his 103-degree fever and mucus-laden cough. As with all of her patients, the doctor's approach to treatment is a combination of classic clinical care with up-to-date medical science, integrating alternative treatments. She prescribes medications as needed, but avoids them when they're not — as in the case of Spencer's chicken soup and thyme-infused-steam route. Another medically-proven favorite is chamomile tea and honey. Hot liquids, lemon and certain herbs ease congestion and speed recovery, while the tryptophan in chicken can help make you sleepy, encouraging needed rest. Chamomile is a natural muscle relaxant (without the side effects of drugs). Honey has anti-microbial properties and suppresses coughs.

Zandvliet's services are available to the entire Palmer household, including Spencer's mom, his dad, Ian, and 7-year-old sister Reese, who was in recently for a check-up. In keeping with the doctor's neighborly spirit, when Zandvliet noticed Reese forgot her headband, the doctor dropped it off at the Palmers on her way home.

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