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EVERGREEN Spotlight

Dr. Meena Sathappan Reflects on Ten Years in Evergreen

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Dr. Meena Sathappan REFLECTS ON TEN YEARS IN EVERGREEN

Dr. Meena Sathappan had always dreamed of having her own medical practice. Though she may not have known it at the time, the first step in seeing her dream come to fruition was a move to Evergreen from Arizona. She and her husband Sathy moved their family here about 15 years ago after hearing positive reports from friends. "They seemed to be really happy with the feeling here, the tight-knit community. We came to see the area and loved it too."

Meena, who had already been working as a pediatrician in Arizona, spent several years after the move working at Kaiser, Valley Medical, and a few other private offices, part-time. Then, when her children got older, she began to look into making her dream a reality.

When she mentioned the idea to her colleagues, they told her that "no one" opens a solo practice in this day and age. They talked about the amount of work that goes into running an office, into dealing with insurance, and all the other issues that come with running your own business. "It was very discouraging."

The discouragement was not enough, however, to overcome her desire to create a smaller practice where she could get to know the families well. Initially, she looked at renting an office near Good Samaritan Hospital, but she soon learned that what people in the community wanted was a doctor closer to them so they wouldn't have to drive so far with a sick child in tow.

Aasha Pediatrics has now been open for ten years. From a starting point of no patients, Aasha Pediatrics grew just as the area has and over the years has registered 6,000 new patients. Within a year and a half, the practice grew out of its first office and moved to its current location on Lexann Avenue.

"We grew through word of mouth," Meena explains. "Some come to see; they recommend us to their neighbors, to their family who also live in the area. The community is so supportive of smaller physician practices where the family gets to know the doctor and vice versa."

Historically, Meena has been the only full-time doctor at Aasha Pediatrics, running the practice solo but with the help of other doctors who have worked part-time. Recently, Dr. Rothtida Srey has joined the practice on a full-time basis. The two doctors share a work ethic and a commitment to making themselves available to their patients at all times.

"[It's a] very personalized practice. Every family that walks in, I get to know the patient and their family. We answer our own phone calls. Even after hours, if a patient needs to reach us, they can. We try to keep patients from needing to go to urgent/emergency care, so we often offer advice to help them over the weekend."

The doctors' breadth of cultural knowledge allows them to serve a wide swath of the Evergreen community. Rothtida speaks Chinese, Cambodian, and Spanish while Meena speaks Tamil, Hindi, and Telugu. "I also feel like I'm getting the hang of Vietnamese from hearing it so often," Meena laughs. "I can pick out the important words, which delights and surprises the patients."

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Aasha Pediatrics works with children from infancy to the age of 18. As children grow up, the services they offer tend to shift from treating illnesses to providing family support. "A lot of the time pediatrics is about counseling patients and dealing with things there is no quick cure for. It's very satisfying to help parents work through tough times in a child's life, dealing with not just the physical but also the psychological issues. A lot of appointments are meeting with the parents and child, individually or together, and coming up with strategies to help both the child and the family."

Meena really enjoys living in the community where she works, supporting families, and watching children that she has cared for since they were small grow up into adulthood. Her message to parents in the Evergreen community is to be strong advocates for their children. "Kids can't speak for themselves. So, as parents, we should never be afraid to ask questions. It's always a good idea to question and be a partner with your pediatrician in making decisions about your child's health."

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