**FACULTY OBITUARIES**

“The Kind of Doctor Anyone Would Want for Their Children”

Pediatrician **Steven Parker** was a child development expert who offered sage advice

*By Cynthia K. Buccini*

**AT THE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE,** Steven Parker was known as a superb teacher, a colleague with a sense of humor, a pediatrician who treated the sickest children, and an expert in early childhood development. To parents who followed his WebMD blog Healthy Children, he was a doctor who dispensed sensible, spot-on, reassuring advice.

Parker, sixty-two, a School of Medicine associate professor of pediatrics and director of developmental and behavioral pediatrics at Boston Medical Center (BMC), died on April 13, 2009. Not long after, readers of his blog began posting testimonials on his message board. “Though I never met him, his professional advice made me feel as if I have known him for ages,” said one parent. “I have raised my baby, who is four months old, using his advice.”

And another: “We have valued his advice and his bedside manner (somehow he made this come through via the Internet; it’s truly amazing).”

“He was the kind of doctor that anyone would want for their children, because he was nice, smart, wise, and he understood what was going on and could help parents and children,” says Barry Zuckerman, Joel and Barbara Alpert Professor of Pediatrics and chair of pediatrics at MED and chief of pediatrics at BMC, who recruited Parker to BU about twenty-five years ago. “He took care of children with some of the most complicated medical problems — they tended to be children who were born premature and have a myriad of problems.”

To better care for those patients, Parker founded and directed the Comprehensive Care Program at BMC, a national model in family-centered care for children with developmental disabilities.

“His loss will be felt there,” Zuckerman says. “He was experienced, he was wise, and the patients knew him — and for a long time. These are kids who have cerebral palsy and other kinds of problems, and parents and children over time grow to trust someone.”


In addition to publishing many scientific articles on children’s development and behavior, Parker coauthored the seventh edition of *Dr. Spock’s Baby and Child Care* with Benjamin Spock; he was the last physician to collaborate with the famous baby doctor on the book.

In an interview with *Bostonia* after the book’s release, in 1998, Parker recalled the telephone call he had received four years before. “Dr. Spock was calling — it was hard to believe,” he said.

The two agreed on almost everything, Parker told *Bostonia.* “The most vexing area was diet,” he said. “Ben had become macrobiotic, and he recommended a heavy-duty vegetarian diet for kids.” In the end, Parker said, the collaboration “was a blast.”

Parker also was codirector of Healthy Steps, a $40 million national experiment that improved pediatric care by placing an early childhood specialist in pediatric practices to promote children’s social, emotional, and cognitive development. He became WebMD’s chief pediatric consultant in 2000, launching his blog in 2005.

Parker trained hundreds of resident pediatricians as well as postgraduate fellows in developmental and behavioral pediatrics.

“He was a superb teacher,” says Zuckerman. “He was knowledgeable, he was articulate, he had a sense of humor. He was among the best.”

Parker earned a B.A. in psychology from Cornell University and an M.D. from the University of Michigan Medical School.

“We were collaborators, colleagues, and friends,” says Zuckerman. “It’s a profound loss for patients and staff here.”

**WEB EXTRA**

Watch a video of MED’s Steven Parker at [www.bu.edu/bostonia](http://www.bu.edu/bostonia).