

The Columbus Dispatch

An ounce of prevention

Nationwide Children's Hospital doctor makes child safety job No. 1

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A child's life can be altered in an instant: a bicycle crash, a kiddie-pool drowning, a bathtub fall, a gumball lodged in a tiny throat, a heavy bookshelf that toppled when it was employed as a ladder by an energetic tot. Many of these accidents and tragedies are preventable.

Such incidents drive the work of a Nationwide Children's Hospital physician recognized nationally this month for his invaluable contributions to prevention of deaths and injuries, and improving product safety.

Dr. Gary A. Smith, director of the Center for Injury Research and Policy, educates parents and manufacturers. He is one of five individuals and groups honored with the new Chairman's Circle of Commendation award by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

Smith is a good example of a local resident whose contributions reach out nationally. This researcher, who is a professor of pediatrics, epidemiology and emergency medicine at Ohio State University, has worked diligently and without flash to make the world a safer place for children.

"We live in a world that is designed by adults, largely for the convenience of adults. And child safety is too often an afterthought," Smith said. "We can figure out ways to protect them through very simple interventions. For example, book shelves to a child — that's a climbing opportunity. When a parent leaves a remote control on a shelf, a child will climb up."

A 2009 research paper by Smith and his center documented furniture tip-over injuries to children and teens. The manufacturing industry quickly embraced new safety standards, providing inexpensive plastic straps or brackets that secure shelving to walls.

Accidents are the leading cause of injury and death for children in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In a 2008 report, the CDC found that more than 12,000 children die each year in the U.S. from an unintentional injury, and another 9.2 million are treated in emergency rooms.

As a young doctor, Smith saw the tragedies in emergency rooms and realized that injury prevention was a relatively under-researched area. He changed that.

Over the years, Smith has helped to eliminate hazards associated with things kids encounter daily, to name a few: slippery bathtubs, kiddie pools, bunk beds, all-terrain vehicles, shopping carts, playgrounds and bicycles.

As a father of two active boys, he knows children need to be able explore the world, one adults make safer. (For tips, go to <http://injuryresearch.net/injuryresources.aspx>.)

Smith's innovative research and dedication have allowed many children to stay out of the very hospital to which he brings honor.

<http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/editorials/2011/12/11/an-ounce-of-prevention.html>