

Visiting Shanghai Children's Hospital

by Jenny Wu

Taking an infant to see a doctor only months after moving to Shanghai is an interesting experience, one that many expat families can relate to. The following account is derived from one mother's experience of taking a 7 month old baby to see a doctor at a local hospital for diarrhea after moving to Shanghai.

Shanghai Children's Hospital, (Er Tong Yi Yuan 上海市儿童医院), is a well respected children's hospital located in Jing An District. It services children in greater Shanghai, both the local community as well as foreigners. Worldlink and United Family Health are known to refer their specialty pediatric cases to them. This article will illustrate both the local standard route of seeing a doctor, as well as taking the VIP route.

Shanghai Children's Hospital

The hospital is located on Beijing West Road at Tong Ren Road. It's a short 3 block walk from Jing An Temple metro station, on Line 2. Several bus lines have stops close by and taxis are well familiar with the hospital. As with many places in Shanghai, the entrance to this hospital is through an alleyway leading to the main building. It is unassuming and easy to miss, especially if you don't read Chinese. You won't miss, however, the steady stream of parents and/or grandparents taking their children in and out. The alley is lined on both sides with small shops hawking various gewgaws that appeal to children, so parents beware. At the same time, you may find just the thing to bribe your child to endure the whole ordeal of seeing the doctor.

The "Standard" Procedure

The out-patient clinic is in a short white building to the left of the main hospital building. An information desk is on the left as you enter. Tell the nurse your child's symptoms and she will give you a number which

assigns your child to the appropriate department to be seen. Next, you will need to fill out your child's medical record booklet with the following information (name, birth date, contact info, etc). These booklets are found on table towards the front of the building, next to the windows. Queue up at one of the registration (gua hao) windows to the left of the stairs once your booklet is filled out. The registration fee is 15.6 RMB, which includes a 1.5 RMB fee for a patient card, if it is your first visit. The service person will give you another number and direct you upstairs to the clinic. The stairs are next to the registration windows, but an elevator is located towards the back of the building, easily found by following well marked signs.

Shanghai Children's Hospital

Once upstairs, locate the appropriate department and wait for your number to be called. The number will be both announced and displayed on a screen. Once your number has been called, present yourself to the nurse at the station and she will direct you to which door to go to. Though a sign on the door reads that people should wait until the previous patient has left before entering, this rarely happens. You may also want to position yourself so others may not cut in front of you. The exam rooms are stark, without decoration, just a desk and an examination table. The doctor will take your child's patient card and medical record and ask for his or her symptoms. The doctor will spend approximately 5 minutes with you, performing a short examination and asking questions. At the end of the exam, he or she will either send you off for a laboratory test or prescribe some medications. In either case, you will need to pay for the lab test or meds downstairs at the cashier window before proceeding to the laboratory or pharmacy.

Shanghai Children's Hospital

The clinical laboratory is located towards the back of the building, through double doors to your left as you face the cashiers window. Once through the doors, head

left until you see the laboratory. If a urine or fecal sample is required, pick up a plastic specimen cup at the window off the hallway. Bathrooms are located further down the hall. If bringing a diaper, it's recommended that you keep it chilled to maintain its integrity. Drop off the specimen at the same window and wait nearby for your name to be called for the results. Fecal samples take approximately 5 minutes as the technician will do a smear and check the sample under the microscope. Take the results back upstairs and tell the nurse at the station that you have lab results. She will direct you to wait outside the doctor's door until he or she is done with the previous patient. The doctor will check the results of the test and then prescribe appropriate treatment.

After you have paid for the medicines at the cashiers window, go to the pharmacy window behind you to pick up your meds. The technician will pull the medicines and hand write a label with instructions and apply it to the medicine. You should clarify the directions before leaving the window, as some labels can be illegible. It is recommended that you make notes for yourself as trying to find the prescribing doctor again may be difficult.

This particular morning, the entire process took an hour and a half. It took longer than most appointments because the author chose to wait for the original doctor to return from his lunch break rather than taking the results to another doctor. Afternoons may be a good time to see a doctor because there seem to be fewer patients, though avoiding the right after lunch crowd at 1pm is suggested.

The "VIP" Route

A week later, a return to the hospital was needed as the baby was still exhibiting symptoms. This time, the VIP route was selected. The experience at the VIP clinic was MUCH different. The VIP Clinic is located in the gray hospital building at the end of the alley, on the right as you enter the building. It's a medium sized room decorated with cartoon characters. There are also television screens playing health tips as well as

toys to keep kids occupied while they wait. The nurses' station is in the middle of the room and they will ask for your child's symptoms to determine if the doctors can treat him or her. There was also a doctor on staff for Chinese medicine. The registration fee of 108RMB is collected at the station. If any samples were brought in, the nurse will write out a lab slip and send a runner to the lab for you. The lab fee is also paid for at the nurses' station. The runner will return with the results and you will wait to see the next available doctor. The exam rooms are decorated and seem friendlier compared to those in the out-patient clinic. The doctor will perform a short exam and ask questions and you will be able to spend more time with the doctor getting your questions answered. At the end, the doctor will prescribe some medications and a runner will collect it from the pharmacy for you. Again, this is paid for at the nurses' station. A nurse will explain how to take the medicines and you will be done. This visit lasted 40 minutes, with perhaps a 5 minute wait each time for the doctor, lab results and prescriptions.

Shanghai Children's Hospital

Both visits to Er Tong Hospital were conducted with a fluent Mandarin speaker. While some of the nurses and doctors at the VIP clinic speak English, it is advised that English only speakers call 6247 4880 x5101 prior to going to the clinic, to verify if an English speaking doctor will be on staff that day.

Any subsequent visits to the hospital, remember to bring your child's patient card and medical record booklet, otherwise you will need to create another record for your child. It is also helpful to bring any lab reports, etc. so the next doctor can reference them. Comparing the two visits, the VIP route is HIGHLY recommended. The 94 RMB difference in price is well worth the time and stress saved from not having to locate the right windows or departments to register, pay for services or get a lab test. You will spend more time with the doctor and you stay in one room instead of having to dash around and then wait in line. The

nurses were friendlier and more willing to take the time to answer questions in the VIP room. Lastly, but certainly not least, there are fewer patients in the VIP room, which means less exposure to whatever illnesses are floating around the out-patient clinic for both parent and child.

Shanghai Children's Hospital is a good local children's hospital, one that provides a cost effective alternative to the Western style hospitals found in Shanghai. While those expecting Expat-standard medical care may be disappointed, the staff treat and care for hundreds of sick children every day and seem to do a fine job of it. This author is comfortable with the level of care observed, and will be bringing her son to this hospital again if medical attention is again needed.

Jenny Wu has been in and out of Shanghai for over 4 years but became a trailing spouse and full time mom recently arriving in Shanghai to live earlier this year. She is an active member of the ShanghaiMama's group and proud mom of a one year old son, Devon, otherwise known by some in the ShanghaiExpat community as "Baby Yu".