

# **MANHEIM EXHIBIT 2**



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## Family and pediatrician tangle over gun question

Among inquiries about baby's health was "Do you keep a gun in the house?"

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It was a question Amber Ullman least expected Wednesday from her children's pediatrician.

Do you keep a gun in the house?

When the 26-year-old Summerfield woman refused the answer, the Ocala doctor finished her child's examination and told her she had 30 days to find a new pediatrician and that she wasn't welcome at Children's Health of Ocala anymore.

"Whether I have a gun has nothing to do with the health of my child," said the mother of three girls.

The question about the gun had been the last in a series of health questions about Ullman's 4-month old baby that Dr. Chris Okonkwo had been asking.

"And I'm upset because my children were discharged because I refused to answer the question whether I have a gun... in the house. It's a very invasive and a very personal question," said Ullman, who works as a property manager.

Ullman said Okonkwo – medical director of Children's Health of Ocala – wouldn't explain why he was asking the question.

"All he asked me was, 'Are you refusing to answer the question?' and I said, 'Yes, I'm refusing to answer the question,'" she said. "The questions stopped at that point."

As originally reported by channel WKMJ 6 in Orlando, Ullman said she called her husband from the doctor's office and threatened to call a lawyer over the incident.

Okonkwo told the Star-Banner he asked Ullman about whether she had a gun in her home because of the safety of her children, and told her so.

He said he asks such questions of all his patients because if there are guns in a home with children, he advises that parents lock them away so children don't hurt themselves.

"The purpose is to give advice... I don't tell them to get rid of the guns," he said. "The purpose is to give advice."

He said that more than half the families he treats have guns.

Okonkwo said that during the summer, he asks parents the same kinds of questions about whether they have pools at their homes and gives advice about keeping them safe so children don't wander in and drown.

He said he does the same with young drivers, and asks whether they use their cell phones when they drive.

"I've been asking these questions two, three years," he said.

Occasionally parents ask why he's inquiring, he said, but when he explains that it's to give them safety tips, they comply, Okonkwo said.

When asked whether he explained to Ullman why he was asking about guns in her home, he said she was too defensive and snapped at him, saying "That it wasn't any of my business... so there was no point."

Okonkwo said the issue was not about whether the parents owned a gun.

He said he would stop being a child's doctor if the parents also refused to give information about whether they had a pool or smoked in the house.

He said the doctor and patient have to develop a relationship of trust and that if parents won't answer such basic safety questions, how could they trust each other about more important health issues.

He said he respected a patient's right not to answer questions, but it was also his right to no longer treat them.

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Ullman's husband, Tom Ullman, said Okonkwo had gone too far.

"If I don't have to register my gun with the state of Florida, why do I have to tell my pediatrician whether I own a gun?" Tom Ullman asked.

"What's safer for my child, to let the question go or discharge my children to another pediatrician?" he added.

The American Association of Pediatrics urges pediatricians to ask questions of parents about gun ownership when they get children's medical histories and to suggest that parents remove guns from the home.

Doctors are not required by law to treat patients.

Amber Ullman said she isn't looking to harm her children's former doctor or discredit him, but rather warn people as to what might happen at the doctor's office.

"I want to let parents know that there could be consequences if you refuse to answer a question that you feel is private," she said. "Now my children have to suffer because of this and that's not right."

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