A self-described Chicago White Sox fan extraordinaire, Stewart Goldman, MD, Associate Professor of Pediatrics at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, loves team endeavors. Selecting the medical center environment as his home field, he thrives on the multidisciplinary approach needed to deliver the best care for children with brain tumors. “It’s the ultimate team challenge,” he explains. “To this day, I still thoroughly enjoy being part of an effort that requires input from so many specialists to succeed and provide effective care.”

Medical Director and Gus Foundation Chair of Neuro-Oncology at the Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago, Goldman focuses his clinical practice and research activities on pediatric brain tumors: specifically, brain stem gliomas. These difficult-to-treat tumors result in progression of 50 percent of patients within nine months leading to death in more than 90 percent in 18 months. Faced with this poor prognosis for his patients, Goldman long ago turned to advancing research in the field. He serves as the Chicago Principal investigator for the Pediatric Brain Tumor Consortium as well as the Children’s Oncology Group’s Developmental Therapeutics Consortium site at Lurie Children’s. As Director of the Clinical Trials Research Center at Children’s Hospital of Chicago Research Center, he is involved in developing and teaching new treatments for brain tumors.
“It’s exciting to be able to contribute to the care of these patients through novel therapies—many made possible through our Phase I consortium and collaborations with others around the world,” says Goldman, who is also Interim Division Head of Pediatric Hematology, Oncology and Stem Cell Transplantation at Feinberg, and the Center for Cancer and Blood Disorders at Lurie Children’s. “At Lurie Children’s we offer therapies that can’t be found at other hospitals.”

Goldman and his team recently wrapped up a Phase I study on the drug Xerecept. The trial focused on the drug’s ability to enhance the lives of patients with brain stem gliomas. While not a treatment for attacking the tumors themselves, Xerecept helps control symptoms with fewer of the severe side effects of the currently used steroid-based drug Decadron. Goldman has been partnering with colleagues in Northwestern’s Department of Medical Social Sciences on the outcomes research aspects of the brain tumor survivorship study. The investigators hope to soon move to a Phase III trial to hasten the drug’s commercial availability. He says, “Even while these life-threatening tumors grew, patients and their families still experienced better quality of life with Xerecept than they would have had without it. Finding a cure is always our hope but improving the lives of these kids in the meantime is important, too.”

Another brain stem clinical trial recently launched at Lurie Children’s has Goldman excited about opportunities to better tailor treatment. Investigators hope to use molecular markers identified via brain stem biopsies to individualize therapy in children and young adults with newly diagnosed diffuse intrinsic pontine gliomas. “Lurie Children’s is the second site of some 17 ultimate sites that is currently up and running, and we are leading in enrollments,” says Goldman, who admits he does have a bit of a competitive streak.

Two older sisters kept youngest sibling Goldman in check as kids growing up in the Chicago area. Goldman attended the University of Iowa in Iowa City, where he earned his BS degree in psychology and planned to become a therapist. Several stints as an EMT in Illinois and Iowa, however, eventually pointed him in the direction of becoming a family medicine practitioner. “I was going to be your neighborhood doctor.” While earning his medical degree at Loyola University’s Stritch School of Medicine in Maywood, Illinois, he became enamored with pediatrics during a clinical rotation and completed a pediatrics residency followed by a pediatric oncology fellowship at the University of Chicago. “I fell in love with the subspecialty because I felt it would allow me to be a tertiary care primary care physician,” he says, “There were also wonderful opportunities to see cancer care improvements in the future for patients and their families.” After completing his subspecialty training, Goldman joined the University of Chicago faculty, where among other leadership roles he served as director of the very fellowship program that had shaped him as a pediatric oncologist. Married to Dee, a nurse, and the parent of three children, this Oak Park resident came to Northwestern in 1997.

Nurturing team members is another aspect of Goldman’s passion for the power of teams. He takes great pleasure in helping develop future specialists in pediatric neuro-oncology and neurosurgery through Northwestern’s and Lurie Children’s fellowship program. “We’ve really been blessed to train terrific and compassionate rising stars who are going to be great leaders in the field both nationally and internationally,” says Goldman, who serves as Clinical Practice Director of Pediatric Hematology-Oncology at Lurie Children’s. Several of his former fellows have stayed on, joining the faculty at Northwestern.

In addition to infusing the pediatric neuro-oncology team with new talent, Goldman looks forward to further strengthening ties with the downtown campus now that Lurie Children’s has opened. “The new hospital has greatly enhanced our ability to interact more closely with our adult neuro-oncology colleagues and basic scientists at the Lurie Cancer Center and develop programs together,” he says. “This is definitely a case of one plus one equaling more than two.”