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AAP News

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Dr. Yasuda reflects on personal, professional calling and his next chapter

by Wynn St. Clair, Correspondent

No one was surprised when Kyle Yasuda, M.D., FAAP, decided to run for AAP president-elect.

Except, perhaps, his 22-year-old daughter.

"I thought you weren't going to do that," Mirei Yasuda told her father.

Dr. Yasuda explained to her that the timing simply seemed right. He was ready to take the next step in an award-winning career dedicated to improving the lives of children.

"It feels like the right thing to do, and I have some unfinished things I want to accomplish," he said. "My daughter is graduating from college and I'm moving on to a new phase in my life."

To be sure, Dr. Yasuda's career has largely depended upon his daughter's needs and what he perceived was best for their family. When his wife died from pancreatic cancer 16 years ago, he gave up his private practice and moved into academia so he could devote more time to Mirei, who was in first grade at the time.

The move meant ending regular interactions with his patients and their parents, something he had enjoyed for nearly 20 years. The decision, he said, was both the easiest and hardest one he had ever made.



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moved into academia after his wife died 16 years ago. Now his daughter Mirei's graduation from college means he is ready for a new direction in his pediatric career.

Professional crossroads

With Mirei's graduation from college, Dr. Yasuda is at another professional crossroads. A year ago, he left the University of Washington School of Medicine after serving as both clinical professor of pediatrics for 16 years and medical director of the associated pediatric clinics. He now is medical director of Best Starts for Kids, a \$400 million voter-supported initiative in King County, Wash., that focuses on prevention and early intervention from prenatal to 24 years of age.

He also has decided to run for AAP president-elect.

"He has been a general pediatrician, academician and served as a public health provider," said Martha Middlemist, M.D., FAAP, District VIII vice chairperson. "I believe this gives him a deep understanding of the practice of pediatrics. It also provides him with insight into the variety of patient types that pediatricians manage. It is this type of expertise that will allow him to lead the AAP confidently into the future."

Dr. Yasuda's candidacy comes after more than three active decades with the Academy, during which he has served as the Washington state chapter president and has been active in immunization advocacy activities. He also has chaired the AAP Committee on Practice and Ambulatory Medicine, which often is called on to comment on how policies and procedures could impact pediatricians in practice.

Dr. Yasuda was elected chair of District VIII in 2011 after serving as vice chair. His district includes much of the West Coast, with the exception of California.

"He truly feels a sense of duty that he can make a difference, working for kids, pediatricians and families," said Matthew J. Hirschfeld, M.D., Ph.D., FAAP, an Alaska-based pediatrician who was mentored by Dr. Yasuda during his residency. "He leads by example. No one works harder for kids or families or pediatricians. And he doesn't take credit for anything. I always say he leads from behind. He doesn't care if he gets credit, he just wants the end result."

Focus on helping others

If elected president, Dr. Yasuda said he will continue the AAP tradition of staunchly advocating for children and families, but he also wants to focus on members' well-being. He's troubled by recent studies that show at least 400 doctors commit suicide each year, a number that's about the size of an entire medical school class.

Though residents generally are well-supported, Dr. Yasuda wants to ensure that programs are in place to help pediatricians once they complete their residency. It's not surprising, he said, that 50% of physicians feel burned out.

"This is not a new thing, but we need to focus on it to make it a fiber of the Academy," Dr. Yasuda said. "We need to keep the momentum going and stress the importance of this. I appreciate the analogy of when you're on an airplane, in the event of an emergency, you're instructed to put the oxygen mask on yourself first and then take care of others. As pediatricians, we have to take care of ourselves first so we can effectively take care of



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others."

Indeed, Dr. Yasuda has long demonstrated an affinity for learning about the issues that matter to the medical community. While teaching at the University of Washington - where he earned both his undergraduate and medical degrees - he gained a deep satisfaction working with the next generation of doctors, teaching them about critical pediatric topics and listening to their concerns.

He received the Stanley Stamm Role Model in Medicine award from the university's pediatric residency program in 2005. And in 2014, he won the Academic Pediatric Association's Teaching Program award.

Now a professor emeritus, Dr. Yasuda has turned his focus to Best Start for Kids, a six-year initiative that is funded by county property taxes. He also has helped establish BestStart Washington, a charity that develops and funds innovative projects to improve children's physical health, emotional well-being and academic achievement.

"You take what you've learned from your various experiences and exposures. You think about the next steps to help communities and kids," he said. "It's exciting. It's a different flavor."

Personal journey

In between his various initiatives, Dr. Yasuda enjoys traveling, fishing and cooking. He's also proud of his daughter, who majored in sociology at Occidental College in California, played collegiate water polo for four years, had an internship with the Make-a-Wish Foundation and hopes to work for a sports foundation.

She also had worked quietly with the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network chapter on her campus for a while before she mentioned it to her father. She then became chapter president.

More than a decade after Debbie Yasuda's death, Mirei Yasuda is honoring her mother's life in a way that has profoundly moved her father. And, in many ways, her efforts also pay homage to the sacrifices her dad made.

"She really has come full circle," Dr. Yasuda said. "She wants to be involved."

With the day-to-day single parenting responsibilities behind him - he still jokingly laments that he never learned to braid hair despite reading books on the topic - Dr. Yasuda is exploring new hobbies. He has a growing interest in how other cultures embrace nature and examining the connection between nature and overall health.

"I'm in a transition time," he said. "And I'm learning to appreciate new things."

For a profile of AAP president-elect candidate Michael A. Weiss, D.O., FAAP, visit <http://www.aappublications.org/news/2017/06/02/Weiss060217>.