“Why Pediatrics?”

By Korrina Siddiqui, MD

When I think about “why pediatrics,” I think about “Cutie”, a 6-month-old with bilateral pulmonary vein stenosis, a diagnosis with a challenging prognosis and reason for transfer to my hospital.

She was my patient on my very first day as an intern. I had no idea what half the cardiothoracic abbreviations meant. I was already running behind on rounds, with other patients who were just as complicated. The least I could do was actually go in, see her, and do an exam.

She was tachypneic. I remember staring at her chest rise and fall too fast, thinking, Okay… I don’t know exactly what her normal respiratory rate should be, but it definitely shouldn’t look like that. She wasn’t cyanotic, that was something. Her lungs sounded… fine? What am I even doing here? I told my senior, who reassured me: “Don’t worry, she’s like that.”

On rounds, I presented her and got grilled on everything, her pulmonary vein stenosis, her physical exam, her prognosis. Do they even “pimp” in residency? I guess so. That day, it felt brutal.

But over the next two weeks, something changed. I studied. I went back in the afternoons to re-examine her, to learn her baseline, to figure out what better and worse looked like for her. I started to feel more confident presenting her in the mornings, not because I magically knew everything, but because I started to get to know her.

I built a connection with her mom. I’d call her during rounds for updates, then stop by in the afternoons to check in again. I started being able to answer more of her questions or at least help her frame them for the team. And eventually, I felt comfortable enough to hold “Cutie” while I talked to her mom. I think she trusted me, and in turn, I started trusting myself.

Then life got messy. After I left that service, the grind of intern year swallowed me up. New patients, new rotations, exhaustion that clung to me no matter how much I slept or how consistently I kept up my nighttime routines. I was scared I wasn’t learning enough. Scared I wasn’t making an impact. Outside the hospital, things fell apart, too. I was T-boned in a car accident, my car totaled. I felt constantly behind, overwhelmed, uncertain.

Months later, I rotated back to the hospital. Different team, same wards. I glanced at the census and froze. Her name. Her room number.

I told myself I’d just peek in, quietly. I hoped the room would be empty, but when I cracked the door, her mom looked up. Even with my mask on and without the Winnie-the-Pooh Crocs that usually gave me away, she recognized me.

“Hi, Doctor Korrina! Sorry, I forgot your last name!”

My nose tingled. Thank God for masks because I bit my lip hard to keep the tears down. I held “Cutie” again, caught up with her mom, and reassured her that the peds team taking care of them was amazing. “Cutie” looked… okay. All things considered.

And that moment grounded me. Intern year is terrifying, exhausting, and filled with days feeling completely inadequate. But seeing her again reminded me of my why.

My why is to show up, even when I’m scared.

My why is to keep learning, so I can better support my patients and their families.

My why is to be present in the hardest moments and the hardest conversations.

“Cutie” reminded me: my “why” is simply to keep going.

Korrina Siddiqui, MD is a pediatric resident at UCLA. Moved to LA with her partner Ricky, emergency medicine intern, and they love walking around town, engaging in TV time, watching movies at theaters, cooking and trying new restaurants, building Legos, and boxing! Korrina collects flowers into a scrapbook, saves polaroids of memories, and her current favorite stuffed animal is Eugene the Highland cow.