

New board member: Mindful of her roots, Dr. Fukuda brings special brand of energy to newest role

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Wynn St. Clair, Correspondent

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In many ways, Yasuko Fukuda, M.D., FAAP, is living a life that her mother only imagined.

Her parents emigrated from Japan after World War II, settling in California and selling Japanese-made knitting machines as part of an initiative to rebuild their homeland's economy. It wasn't an easy job, given the anti-Japanese sentiment in the years following the war, but Dr. Fukuda's parents persevered.

"We have a term in Japanese called 'gaman,' meaning we will get through this," Dr. Fukuda said. "We're amazingly strong people."

Her mother showed such resolve after her dreams of becoming a doctor were dashed as a young woman. The daughter of a member of the Imperial Japanese Army, Dr. Fukuda's mother was raised by her uncle, who was a physician, and wanted to follow in his footsteps. Circumstances, however, prevented her from attending medical school.

"My family in Japan says that's why I'm a physician, because I'm living my mother's dream," Dr. Fukuda said.

Indeed, by any definition, Dr. Fukuda has had a dream career. A general pediatrician in San Francisco, she has been president of AAP California Chapter 1, spearheaded immunization efforts in her home state and currently serves as an AAP liaison to the Japan Pediatric Society.

Her national and international leadership roles led to her recent election to the AAP Board of Directors, representing California as District IX chair.

She learned she won the election while in Japan last year. The setting's significance did not escape her attention.

"I got the notification at 2:30 in the morning there, and then I couldn't sleep," Dr. Fukuda said. "I was so excited. It felt surreal being in Japan."

Paths to success

A native of the San Francisco area, Dr. Fukuda attended local schools before enrolling at the University of California at Berkeley, where she majored in immunology and microbiology, and the Japanese language. She attended Mayo Medical School in Rochester, Minn., where she was one of just 40 students accepted into the program.

While at Mayo, she met Gerald S. Gilchrist, M.D., FAAP, who long encouraged her participation in the Academy. When Dr. Fukuda became president of the California chapter in 2005, no one was prouder than her mentor.

“He’s someone who really loves to watch you grow in the AAP and was so excited when he found out I was president,” Dr. Fukuda recalled. “He said, ‘You little thing, you’re president!’”

Dr. Fukuda completed her pediatric residency at Children’s Hospital Oakland. In 1994, she joined the office of her childhood pediatrician, William S. Kiyasu, M.D., and has worked there for the past 25 years.

“I have been very reflective,” Dr. Fukuda said. “I have patients that I have known since elementary school that now bring their own kids to see me.”

Dr. Fukuda joined the AAP in 1991 and took her first leadership position five years later when she became a member of the California chapter’s board. Over the past 25 years, she has served the chapter in many capacities, including executive secretary, vice president and president.

On the national level, she has been a member of the National Nominating Committee and the *AAP News* Editorial Advisory Board. She also served as District IX vice chair for six years.



Dedication to community, diversity

Active in the Japanese community of San Francisco, Dr. Fukuda has spent a significant amount of time studying in Japan and learning about the country’s pediatric health care. She also has participated in medical research in Hiroshima, where she has helped investigate the health effects of the atomic bomb drop.

“She brings a diverse and international perspective, especially with all of the work she does in Hiroshima,” said Kris Calvin, CEO of the AAP’s California district. “Her understanding of the needs of a diverse population of kids makes her an asset on the board. She’s so committed and works so strongly to help all diverse populations of kids.”

Former District IX Chair Stuart A. Cohen, M.D., M.P.H., FAAP, described Dr. Fukuda as “an enormous help” during his tenure and praised her for being involved in every facet of district business. In particular, she

advocates tirelessly for the well-being of trainees and early career pediatricians, he said.

“Dr. Fukuda is an outstanding pediatrician but even a better person: kind, generous, warm-hearted,” Dr. Cohen said. “She is an active listener who always tries to form consensus, even in the unlikeliest places with the unlikeliest people. She attacks every issue with determination and is always focused on the AAP mission for the health and welfare of children.”

Member engagement is among her top priorities, with plans to continue advocating for younger pediatricians. The Academy is always at its best when it involves different voices, she said.

“We have so much diversity and we’re recognizing how that diversity can come together and do great things,” she said. “That’s what inspires me. Everyone coming together, everyone contributing their piece. We are one.”

Team spirit

In her free time, Dr. Fukuda enjoys singing, knitting, reading and traveling. She also spends time with her mother, who lives two blocks from her practice.

Dr. Fukuda and her husband, Peter, participate each year in the Cherry Blossom Festival parade in San Francisco, one of the largest Japanese-American celebrations in the country. The couple walks with the local Shiba Inu club, along with their two dogs, Yoshio and Miya.

Peter and Yoshio also compete almost every weekend in agility competitions sponsored by the American Kennel Club and have won numerous ribbons. Dr. Fukuda cheers from the sidelines with Miya.

And while Miya may be too strong-willed to compete like her brother, she is adored at Dr. Fukuda’s medical practice, where she often can be found comforting patients.

“She has sat with many patients who were upset and crying,” Dr. Fukuda said. “She doesn’t bark, so I use her to calm them down.”

Dr. Fukuda also is a die-hard fan of the Golden State Warriors, which has won three NBA championships in the past four years. As she marvels at the team’s amazing run, she can’t help but see the similarities between that organization and the AAP.

“I’m reminded of how they come together as a team for a common goal,” she said. “We’re all teammates.”