

New ABP president: Engaging with pediatricians, trainees tops list of goals

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Judy Schaechter, M.D., M.B.A., FAAP, is known for building systems and coalitions to benefit child health. Now, she looks forward to connecting with pediatricians and trainees in a wider “community” as the new president and CEO of the American Board of Pediatrics (ABP).



Dr. Schaechter began her tenure on Jan. 1 at the Chapel Hill, N.C.-based nonprofit that has almost 140 staff and over 400 volunteers.

“The people are a big part of the reason why I’m so excited to be here,” she said. “The volunteers, most of whom are pediatricians, are the ones who really make the ABP what it is in terms of setting standards, policies, practices ... the dedicated people who make this happen.”

Prior to spending the last year as a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation health policy fellow, Dr. Schaechter was chair of pediatrics and professor of pediatrics and public health sciences at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, and on the faculty since 1997. Among other leadership roles, she was chief of service at Holtz Children’s Hospital in the Jackson Memorial Health System.

Community partnerships, advocacy

While working at Miami and in conjunction with other community groups, Dr. Schaechter created a public-private partnership that brought school health services to 350,000 students in the fourth largest school district in the U.S.

It’s one example of her work to improve access to care. Over the years, as an administrator or volunteer, she has championed various health-related causes, including with the AAP Florida Chapter.

A former member of the AAP Council on Injury, Violence and Poison Prevention Executive Committee, she received its 2021 Fellow Achievement Award and has been an advocate for injury prevention — especially firearm safety.

That passion began early in her career.

During residency, she responded to a trauma call in which two 14-year-old boys had been shot, one in the head and the other in the abdomen.

“We did everything we could but could not save either one of them,” Dr. Schaechter recalled. “When I went to see the families outside of the resuscitation area, one of the moms said to me, ‘You know, they were

friends. And they would have been friends again tomorrow if it weren't for the guns.”

She has called gun violence America's most preventable disease.

After pediatric training at Stanford University and Lucile Packard Children's Hospital in California, Dr. Schaechter moved to Miami.

Initially, she worked in private practice, which she loved. But she wanted to make more of a difference in public health, leveraging partnerships inside and outside of medicine.

“Nothing I've ever done that I thought was worthwhile was done alone. It was always in coalitions, and it was always about bringing smarter people into those networks,” she said.

She has been a leader in many advocacy, policy and community organizations, such as a youth violence prevention initiative co-founded with the Miami-Dade County mayor.

Years later she was a plaintiff in the years-long federal case that overturned the 2011 Florida law prohibiting health care providers from asking patients about firearms in the home. Dr. Schaechter worked with the AAP and others to see that case through.

Ultimate goals

The experience reinforced her appreciation for how pediatricians — and the AAP — stand up for children.

That's not unlike how she sees the ABP mission of lifelong pediatric learning for the betterment of children, with the following goals: advance equity, address the behavioral and mental health crisis, pursue solutions to workforce gaps, connect more certified pediatricians and candidates to the ABP's vision, and sustain the commitment to pediatric excellence through assessment, certification and continuous learning.

At the top of her list is to engage pediatricians — and to “amp up” the enthusiasm around the ABP mission.

“I think pediatricians ... should really be proud of their certification, which is not just a one-time thing but a lifelong trust...The public trusts us because we say we will raise standards, and we will live up to those standards, and that's why we deserve to take care of their children.”