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Benjamin D. Hoffman, M.D., FAAP (second from left) is joined by his wife Jane Kim-Hoffman, M.D., FAAP (far left) and their children Isaac, 22, Noah, 24, and Emma, 26, on a recent vacation.

Dr. Hoffman combines commitments to safety, equity, social justice

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Benjamin D. Hoffman, M.D., FAAP, didn't grow up in a family of doctors, but in many ways, he was predisposed to become one.

He enjoyed science. He liked people. And he was surrounded by relatives who cared about making the world more equitable.

"My father is an experimental physicist, and my grandparents were a social worker, and a pediatrician who worked for the WHO. I grew up in a home where science and service were both central. Pediatrics was basically a melding of the two," he said. "I was fortunate enough to grow up surrounded by really smart people who asked really good questions. Social justice was encouraged in my family."

A staunch commitment to social justice would become a common thread throughout Dr. Hoffman's professional life, as he focused on addressing disparities and advocating for equity. It also spurred his decision to accept the nomination for AAP president-elect. If elected, he would serve as president in 2024.

"Kids need us," Dr. Hoffman said. "They can't vote, so they need advocates. Pediatricians, by nature, are advocates by the work we can do, not only at the community level but the policy level to help systems change."

Influential beginnings

Raised in a multicultural family, Dr. Hoffman bore witness to prejudice and discrimination throughout his childhood. His parents adopted his two sisters — Julie, who is Black, and Carrie, who is Korean — in the early 1970s, becoming the second family in New Jersey approved for interracial adoption.

When the family moved to New Mexico for his father's job, less than two dozen Jewish families and very few children of color lived in the area, he said.

"I watched firsthand how the world treated my sisters differently compared to the way they treated my brother and me," Dr. Hoffman said. "It was not easy. My sisters suffered implicit bias as well as racism, and we were subject to a lot of discrimination due to our religious background."

After graduating from the University of California, Berkeley in 1988 with a degree in anthropology, he attended Harvard Medical School and completed his residency at Seattle Children's Hospital in Washington. He served as chief pediatric resident from 1995-'96.

Dr. Hoffman began his career on the Navajo Nation, where he built a community-based coalition focused on addressing injury disparities. Having spent four years there before returning to academia, the experience left an indelible mark.

"My work with the Indian Health Service is something I'm really proud of and really helped shape me as a pediatrician," he said.

A professor of pediatrics at Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU) School of Medicine, Dr. Hoffman serves as medical director for OHSU's Tom Sargent Safety Center, director of the Oregon Center for Children and Youth with Special Health Needs and vice chair of community health and advocacy.

Leading voice

Over the past two decades in academia, he has been a leading authority on injury and violence prevention. He recently testified before the Consumer Product Safety Commission on the dangers of children ingesting high-powered magnets and the need for safety standards. As chair of the AAP Council on Injury, Violence and Poison Prevention Executive Committee, he has spoken on the dangers of infant products, including inclined sleepers, laundry packets and button batteries.

Dr. Hoffman began advocating for better child passenger safety policies and practices while working with the Indian Health Service in the 1990s. He has led efforts to pass laws in New Mexico and Oregon regarding child health. Those efforts led to his 2019 induction into the National Child Passenger Safety Hall of Fame, as well as a passion for educating pediatricians on how to create change.

As director of the AAP Community Pediatrics Training Initiative since 2018 and a member since 2006, he promotes advocacy training for pediatric residents in North America. It's the kind of instruction and advice he wished he had at the start of his career.

"I completed my residency in 1995, and no one taught me how to engage a community in an authentic way or work with a legislature to change a law," he said. "I wasn't prepared for that work. I wasn't trained, and that work truly changed me. I want to inspire others."

That desire to inspire also contributed to Dr. Hoffman's decision to seek the AAP presidency. Someone first suggested he consider the position more than a decade ago, but Dr. Hoffman didn't think it would be in his

family's best interest at that moment.

Ready for next challenge

With his three children — Emma, 26, Noah, 24, and Isaac, 22 — grown, he reconsidered the opportunity when it recently arose again. He talked it over with his wife, Jane Kim-Hoffman, M.D., FAAP, whom he met during their freshman year at Berkeley. Together, they decided the time was right.

“She has always been a tremendous source of strength and a touchstone for everything I've done. It's so important to have her on this journey for me,” he said.

With voting for AAP president-elect taking place from Aug. 17-31, Dr. Hoffman said he has tremendous respect for his fellow candidate, Warren M. Seigel, M.D., M.B.A., FSAHM, FAAP, and believes the Academy will be in good hands regardless of the election's outcome.

If elected, Dr. Hoffman said he will focus on addressing disparities faced by children and the pediatricians who care for them. Such change, however, means having honest, nuanced discussions in a world increasingly disinterested in them.

“The health and well-being of kids should be nonpolitical, and the things we're seeing about guns, LGBTQ rights, reproductive issues are political issues affecting them,” he said. “Unfortunately, we're at a place in history where the hard conversations we need to have, have become seemingly impossible. We need to meet people where they are.”

A lifetime of advocacy has taught him as much.

“All good advocacy starts with passion,” he said. “I want to use this opportunity to encourage my colleagues to find their passion and act upon it.”