



President-elect candidate: Dr. Shaw's career spans 4 decades, numerous AAP leadership roles

by Wynn St. Clair , Correspondent

At milestone visits with her patients, Pamela K. Shaw, M.D., FAAP, asks them about their goals for the future. What do they want to be when they grow up? What dreams would they like to realize?

She puts the answers into the patients' electronic medical record and revisits the responses with them later. Recently, she reminded a teenage patient that as a 5-year-old, she wanted to be a princess, and when she was in eighth grade, she aspired to be an accountant.

At her last examination on the eve of her high school graduation, the patient told Dr. Shaw that she wanted to dedicate her life to helping people and intended to become a doctor.

"I teared up," Dr. Shaw said. "It's just the coolest part of the visit. It has ended up being a wonderful thing for the kids and their families. It also has them looking to the future."

Dr. Shaw knows about looking toward the future. Since joining the AAP in 1985, she has dreamed of becoming president. She took a significant step closer to that goal when she accepted the nomination as a candidate for president-elect.

It's a goal she has worked toward as she carved out an impressive career that has spanned four decades and numerous AAP leadership positions at state and national levels.

"Since I've been involved in the AAP, my dream was always to be president of the AAP. I would like to lead the AAP. To even be a candidate is a dream come true," Dr. Shaw said. "The opportunity to represent diverse viewpoints is very exciting."

Early inspirations

Raised by a single mother in Kansas, Dr. Shaw learned the importance of a good physician early. At the urging of Dr. Shaw's pediatrician, her mother left an abusive marriage when Dr. Shaw was about a year old.

"It was not an easy decision for her, and she did the right thing," Dr. Shaw said. "I inherited her resilience to do the right thing."

Dr. Shaw and her mother lived with her grandmother in a small Kansas town until she was 12 years old. Both women stressed the importance of education, encouraging Dr. Shaw to become the first member of their family to graduate from college.

She initially planned to become a teacher. After observing a classroom while in college, she realized it wasn't the job she had envisioned. She sat down with a career adviser, who suggested she consider medicine based on aptitude scores in science and math.

After earning a degree in human biology from the University of Kansas (KU) in 1982, Dr. Shaw attended its medical school and completed her pediatric residency at KU. After time spent in private practice, Dr. Shaw returned to KU in 1990 where she has been involved in teaching and general pediatrics practice.

She is a professor of pediatrics at KU Medical Center and assistant dean for clinical sciences and associate vice



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chancellor for student services.

"Dr. Shaw is a pediatrician who appreciates that each child and each family is unique. She provides a level of personalization that meets families where they are while staying grounded in evidence-based care," said Lisa S. Gilmer, M.D., FAAP, an associate professor of pediatrics at KU.



Dr. Shaw conducts a well visit on Malachi, who is held by his father, a medical student. After time in private practice, Dr. Shaw returned to KU in 1990.

Serving the AAP

Dr. Shaw joined the Academy early in her career at the urging of Jim Thompson, M.D., FAAP, a partner in the private practice where she worked. He didn't give her the option of attending a chapter meeting; he simply stated she would attend.

From the beginning, Dr. Shaw saw the importance of the AAP.

"The beauty of the AAP is that it really does represent a diverse group of pediatricians," she said. "But there's one thing that unites us, and that's kids. Kids are precious and so are their futures, and we have to do what's best for them."

Dr. Shaw has served the Academy on numerous levels, including as Kansas Chapter president from 2006-'09. She recently completed a stint on the Board of Directors, where she represented District VI for six years.

"She's a true, humble servant and leader," said Michael V. Severson, M.D., FAAP, a former board member. "She taught me very early on the value of diverse opinions. She has always known how to develop leadership, and that is one of the most valuable things you can pass along to colleagues."

If elected, Dr. Shaw wants to address physician burnout. She would focus on digital transformation, as well, encouraging members to use social media wisely and as a reliable public education tool.

Promoting family wellness



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She also intends to provide education, coordination and resources so that pediatricians can screen for and treat behavioral health issues. She wants to advocate for payments for "wellness" care as well as "illness" care.

"We know that if kids can have one strong, stable relationship, it can help them succeed," she said. "Helping these families with resources helps them with their health and helps them succeed."

Dr. Shaw knows the importance of such resources. Her son Ben was diagnosed with autism while in middle school after struggling for many years. After the appointment, Dr. Shaw asked him how he felt about the diagnosis. His answer was both heartbreaking and optimistic.

"He said to me, 'Mom, I'm just glad to know I'm not stupid,'" Dr. Shaw recalled. "So, it was a really difficult time."

Ben went to college and now works as a senior cook at a local restaurant. Her other sons - Daniel and Andrew - told their parents that they will take care of Ben after they are gone. It was her proudest moment as a mother, she said.

Indeed, it's a reflection of a close-knit family that enjoys spending time together. Dr. Shaw and her husband, Greg, have season tickets to KU basketball, and their sons typically cheer on the Jayhawks with them. They plan to take their three children to see the team play in the Maui Invitational in November.

"We have four season tickets to KU basketball games, so we always joke that the boys get to fight over who gets to go," she said.

When they're not at games, the couple likes to eat at restaurants and try new foods. Dr. Shaw laughs as she acknowledges her foodie tendencies are a far cry from her small-town upbringing.

"I'm a small-town Kansas girl," she said. "I thought fish was fish sticks. I like oysters now."

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