

## Being a Pediatrician and Living in the World of Children

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While books tell the story of the “good side of the paths”,<sup>1</sup> everyone has their own path of life to travel down. Perhaps, the stones of this path are mostly paved in our childhood, but in every single stage of our journey, we retain the motivation to rebuild, reshape, enrich, develop, improve, and to get back on our feet no matter how much we have fallen on the way. As a result of our myriad of internal experiences, personal preferences, and external responsibilities, we end up with an occupation, which from that point onward may become the focal point around which our path evolves. Undoubtedly, as we make our way down the path of life, we seek happiness in whatever endeavors we wish to undertake.

In this inextricable link between our path and our profession, we not only find mental acuity, creativity, self-actualization, and the feeling of having built a “masterpiece” but also the chance to bask in countless opportunities for joy and fulfillment. It is, therefore, not surprising that prominent psychologists such as Doğan Cüceloğlu emphasize the strong relationship between happiness and “the meaning one finds in their profession”<sup>2</sup> or the best-selling book *Ikigai: The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life* centers around “the happiness of being busy”.<sup>3</sup> When I reflect on being a member of the medical profession in this light, I see myself as being “a fortunate man” as John Berger writes in his similarly named novel *A Fortunate Man*.<sup>4</sup> Yet, I consider being a pediatrician a step beyond this, as it is one of the most invaluable gifts that can be bestowed upon anyone. In this personal essay, I will attempt to convey my own journey of becoming a pediatrician and share the pivotal experiences that enriched my years practicing in pediatrics.

### PEDIATRICS ROTATION IN HACETTEPE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND THE INFLUENCE OF DR. UFUK BEYAZOVA

I believe 2 stages of my life were particularly impactful in my decision to become a pediatrician. The first was my pediatrics rotation and internship at Hacettepe. The positive atmosphere at Hacettepe Children’s Hospital, with children, residents, and enthusiastic faculty, led me to consider a career in pediatrics. The discussions that took place in the department meetings on the eighth floor were particularly memorable and helped me feel content in my decision to become a physician. The second such stage in my life was when I met Dr. Ufuk Beyazova during our fifth year public health rotation at the Etimesgut Hospital. Dr. Beyazova, who later contributed tremendously to the foundation and development of the field of social pediatrics, was at the time a young physician, seeing her patients in the clinics and teaching us all about them. Thanks to her, we listened to the chests of countless babies and heard “crepitan rales” and studied chest x-rays to diagnose pneumonia (at that time there were many children coming in with pneumonia). Looking back now, I recognize the resemblance between her knowledgeable, patient, and warm demeanor and the doctor figure Berger described when he said, “Sassall is acknowledged as a good doctor because he meets the deep but unformulated expectation of the sick for a sense of fraternity. He recognizes them. There is about him the constant will of a man trying to recognize,” in his 1967 novel, *A Fortunate Man* with Joan Mohr.<sup>4</sup> After finishing medical school, I went to Adiyaman for my mandatory civil service as a physician. There, I strongly felt the close connection

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between improving the lives of children and being a physician as my decision to become a pediatrician was settled.

### PEDIATRICS RESIDENCY AT DR. SAMI ULUS CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL AND FOLLOWING DR. NUSRET FISEK'S PATH

Dr. Sami Ulus Children's Hospital, with Altindag Theatre and Zubeyde Hanim Maternity Hospital nearby, was one of the beautiful and prestigious institutions of Ankara and Republic. I got my training in pediatrics in this liberal hospital which served to quite high number of patients from all over Anatolia and became proficient in managing a wide variety of pediatric conditions. I stayed in touch with Hacettepe Pediatrics Department through my friends who were still there. For example, my close friend Dr. Ali Süha Çalıkoğlu was the chief resident at Hacettepe Pediatrics and invited me to "chief resident rounds," which expanded my experience in a different clinical setting. During that same period, we also discovered the hidden gem of a medical journal, *Pediatric Clinics of North America*, which greatly contributed to our medical education. We read the articles in those green covered journals with a passion for learning.

Practicing first as a pediatrician, and then as a pediatric endocrinologist, I have always strived to be a scientifically sound, humane, and amiable physician. I aimed to follow in the footsteps of our dear professor Dr. Nusret Fisek, who taught us, "No study should be done solely for the sake of research. All should primarily aim to serve the country." In addition to scientific contributions, I have always valued incorporating literature and poetry into medicine, feeling especially moved by pediatrician-poets like Ceyhun Atuf Kansu, who worked and wrote for the public. At one stage of my life, I met the revered American pediatrician Benjamin Spock, "an educator who argued that every baby is an independent individual, and that strict rules such as feeding hours and toilet training should be abandoned." I always felt inspired by this physician who believed that it will not be possible to protect children's health without battling socioeconomic inequalities.

Perhaps as a consequence of all these influences, I not only worked to help children in the clinics but also served the community by contributing to the implementation of numerous public health measures. I was involved in the Congenital Hypothyroidism Screening Project, publications in medical education journals, raising awareness about poverty and its impacts on children, Preventing Vitamin D Deficiency project, My Friend Diabetes Program, diabetes camps, fighting for the rights of children with diabetes, Diabetes in School Project, obesity prevention, and the release of a school cafeteria guidance.

### A DAY IN MY LIFE AS A PEDIATRICIAN

I worked for 21 years (1995–2016) at Kocaeli University as a clinician, faculty member, head of department, and dean, with the enthusiasm for community-oriented medicine and the vision of creating a medical school based on the culture of good medicine and becoming an influential academician throughout the country.

For the last 5 years, I have been working in Istanbul with an amazing team. Every morning, I start seeing my patients at 8 AM. Arriving in my room in the morning makes me happy. I can spare enough time for each patient as recommended by the Turkish Medical Association, and I see this as a requirement of good medicine. I do not move on to the next patient without completing the current visit just because we are running out of time. Each patient is deserving of my undivided attention. Becoming friends with children, talking with them, and looking into their eyes make me content. Performing physical examination is a part of this communication, and just like the title of one of my books says, "I try to make myself a part of the treatment".<sup>5</sup> I make every effort to ease the concerns from my patients and their families. The principles that guide my practice include avoiding excessive and unnecessary prescription of medications, treating the patient instead of the laboratory values, and never allowing money to become a part of my relationship with my patients. When I see a patient with diabetes for the first time, I write down my recommendations and give the note to the family. I also provide my mobile number to every family, to help them feel safe.

Now, as I reflect on my past, I clearly understand that being a pediatrician and daily interaction with children provide me with support, fulfillment, and happiness. Furthermore, I now consider all my work as an attempt "to create a work of art" and I value this immensely. My gift from those efforts is the bright light radiating from children just like the letter my patient, Zehra, sent from Antalya that addressed me as "Şükrü Hoca, the best friend of children." I know that this light is enough for all of us.

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