Rediscovering Our Why

Jennifer Sonney, PhD, APRN, PPCNP-BC, FAANP

“Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true, that even as we grieved, we grew; that even as we hurt, we hoped, that even as we tired, we tried, that we’ll forever be tied together, victorious.” Amanda Gorman from The Hill We Climb (Gorman, 2021).

Colleagues, as we envision a post-pandemic world, we are all acutely aware of the challenges we face as a pediatric community. We are exhausted, burned out, and contending with moral distress and injury (Peck & Sonney, 2021; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022). We share a collective trauma and do not yet know how best to navigate forward. We struggle to confront the pediatric mental health emergency amidst instability in our nursing workforce. We know the solution is complex and will require substantial collaboration and effort from a profession that has already given so much. I am sure many of us are wondering, how will we carry on? What more do we have to give?

As pediatric-focused advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs), each has made a professional commitment to advancing child health. Although our professional journeys undoubtedly vary, I love that the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners (NAPNAP) represents my professional home with a community of like-minded health professionals. We are clinicians, leaders, advocates, and scholars. Our dedication and passion are evident in all that we do. So, as we consider the greatest challenge facing our profession, I encourage every one of us to take the time to rediscover our “why.” This is a concept borrowed from Simon Sinek, author of Start With Why (Sinek, 2009). Grounded in the corporate world, Sinek argues that companies with the highest customer loyalty have a clear and compelling purpose, cause, or belief. I propose we re-envision this concept to one in which each of us rediscovers our professional purpose, drive, and passion. What fuels you? What cause matters most to you? What is your “why”?

I have long known my professional “why”—my firm belief that every child has the right to high-quality health care. This belief catalyzed my decision to become a pediatric nurse practitioner and serve children from marginalized and minoritized backgrounds. When people ask me why I chose a faculty career, I share that I loved my full-time clinic job, but I came alive in academia. I have the privilege of generating and disseminating new knowledge that will improve the health and lives of children. I delight in bringing pediatrics alive in the classroom; I am energized when I see a student find clarity around a difficult concept. I take immense pride in preparing the next generation of pediatric-focused APRNs. My students become my colleagues and have gone on to make tremendous contributions as pediatric APRN leaders. Collectively, we all have made considerable progress in advancing child health.

The pandemic robbed me of my “why.” I became consumed by reactive tasks as I desperately worked to maintain a viable educational experience for my students. I struggled to dredge up extra energy to support my community in crisis. I put on a brave face for my children as I assured them we would find a way through this. I was overwhelmed, scared and disillusioned. I was consumed with guilt in knowing I was one of the lucky ones. I felt as though I had nothing left to give. After many tearful discussions, my family decided we needed to reevaluate our commitments and priorities, which now include a clear focus on self and family care. What followed was a similar effort for me professionally. After careful introspection, I began a deliberate but painful effort to realign my commitments with my “why.” The result is a focused professional dedication toward my passion, child health, including my commitment to serve as President of NAPNAP. Although I still have a tremendous

President and Fellow NAPNAP, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, New York, NY

Elizabeth C. Giblin Endowed Professor in Symptom Science, Department of Child, Family, and Population Health Nursing, School of Nursing, University of Washington, Seattle, WA

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Correspondence: Jennifer Sonney, PhD, APRN, PPCNP-BC, FAANP, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, 5 Hanover Square, Ste. 1401, New York, NY 10004; e-mail: jsonney@uw.edu


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workload, centering my “why” has reignited my energy and passion for my work.

Rediscovering my “why” has led me to reclaim my professional fulfillment and with it fresh energy, focus, and drive. We are living history, and each must forge our path forward through our collective trauma. I encourage you to pause, reflect, and consider your “why,” personally and professionally. Invest in yourself and your passion. If, like me, your professional “why” centers on child health, NAPNAP is here for you as your professional home. As experts in pediatrics and advocates for children, we invite you to engage in your community of pediatric-focused APRNs. The NAPNAP ecosystem has tremendous resources, leadership opportunities, and networking forums to connect with your colleagues. Perhaps start with a new educational offering to expand your clinical repertoire on PedsCE. Consider reaching out to your chapter or special interest group and ask how you can get involved. You are welcome to join the monthly NAPNAP Child Health Policy Learning Collaborative calls to learn about national, state, and local policy trends and advocacy solutions. You also have an open invitation to contact us, and we will assist you in finding opportunities to engage. NAPNAP is here for you and is eager to support those who wish to reengage with their child health “why.” It will take all of us to face the challenges ahead, but I am certain we will do so together with wisdom, passion, and fearless determination.

REFERENCES

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