

IAFP Inauguration Address – Asim Jaffer, MD, FAAFP

October 5, 2017 – Rosemont, IL

Thank you so very much. I am honored and humbled by the trust you have placed in me.

Especially when we are talking about health care in Illinois, and this membership organization of almost 3,000 family physicians and more than 600 family medicine residents that care for those patients.

I have been blessed to be a part of this great organization for the last decade. I have seen life in Illinois before health care reform, during reform, and the continuing debate over health care reform. I am blessed and honored and thankful -- and terrified to be in this position. But I am also extremely hopeful about the future.

I have a confession... Actually I have many confessions to make today. What better way to learn about the new IAFP president then for me to bare my soul with a few close friends...

I was born and raised in the suburbs of Chicago (that's not a confession, though!). Trained as an international medical graduate. Fortunate to be trained as a family physician by Penny Tippy at SIU in Carbondale. Blessed to spend the last 10 years of my career as a faculty member at the University of Illinois College of medicine in Peoria residency training program where I have learned much more than I have taught.

Along the way, I have been able to be that pluripotential stem cell that Family Medicine is. I have seen my career focus change in directions I never anticipated based on what my community needed from me. I never planned to get boarded in hospice and palliative care medicine. Never dreamed about hospital administration.

I didn't have my sights set on leadership roles in our state and national Academy....

My story is not unique. It is a story of opportunity. My origin story begins in January 1966 in a small village in India where my father was the oldest in a family of 10 siblings and the sole breadwinner after his own father died. Dad made the difficult decision to leave a stable job and his family and come to America where he landed in Dekalb Illinois with 8 borrowed dollars in his pocket. (infamous \$8)

He built a life for himself and ultimately was able to bring over the rest of his family. His courage, sacrifice and dedication, coupled with his vision of the American Dream, and the opportunities available in the greatest country in the world has produced a legacy of physicians, lawyers, engineers, teachers, businessman, and entrepreneurs that exemplify what is possible in America.

Yes, I'm bragging about my family. I'm bragging about my father, the origin of my story. He is my Christopher Columbus and Neal Armstrong. But this story is not unique. We each have our own origin story that starts with something similar.

I am not unique. I do the same work as you do in your own clinics, hospitals, and communities. Family Physicians are an integral part of the legacy of healthcare. One of my favorite quotes that I share with the students and residents is 'If you're not at the table you're on the menu'. I stole this a long time ago from AAFP FAM-MED PAC and try to pass it off as my own. No one is more qualified to advocate for our patients than Family Physicians. **Every patient deserves a comprehensively trained family physician, and let's be honest, Family Medicine is the only specialty designed to treat the patient instead of the disease.**

This brings me to my next confession: I am a thief. I'm a dirty thief that steals ideas and best practices from those that I respect. The way I interact with patients, the way I manage my staff, the leadership skills that I have developed are all borrowed from those that I've watched and admired. In fact, I stole that idea from Dr. Anad Salem when I was a resident. The things my faculty mentors taught me I continue to teach generations of residents in Peoria. I gave them credit the first time I use it and then claim it as my own. That's a rule I stole from Dr. Jerry Goddard who was also my mentor in Carbondale.

Here is another confession. I wasn't easy to raise. It truly took a village to raise this family doctor. I'm also the luckiest person in the world, with not one, but three families.

I already talked about my First Family. My parents who instilled in me their gratitude for and the possibilities of the American Dream. Their drive and work ethic and religious and family values are all that I know. Naziya, my wife for the last 11 years and my wonderful children, Kamran and Sommer help me keep everything in perspective. My wife who has an incredible amount of patience supports me and puts up with my ridiculous schedule that essentially makes her a single mom. Heck, she is still in Peoria!

My second family are my colleagues at Unity Point health in Peoria. They all my mentors, my advisors, my friends. They support me in my Academy activity. They cover for me when I travel. They make be a better doctor and a better person. (The amazing and supportive culture that was established by Tom and Joan Golemon, Kelvin/Jeff/Craig/Rahmat etc.) I almost feel guilty that my dream job was my first job. I guess that's another confession, right?

My third family is my family at the IAFP. You have raised me. The leadership skills I've learned with the Academy have served me in my day job and my activities within my community. My career has more meaning and more personal satisfaction. Working with the Academy has opened more doors than I could on my own. I am forever grateful to the staff as well as my academy mentors. Javette Orgain, David Hagan, Donald Lurye, Ed Blumen, Alvia Siddiqi, Katie Miller, Carolyn Lopez – I thank you all.

IAFP's success stories of recent years or this upcoming year are a culmination of the hard work and dedication of so many people. The IAFP staff do more than any of us realize. It is their steady hand through generations of board members that allow the Academy to consistently serve in Illinois and also represent us at the national level.

My last confession... I can't do this alone. I have a great deal of faith in the board we have just elected. I have worked with them and respect them and trust them. I have the impossible job of trying to fill the shoes of Dr. Donald Lurye. I have a personal request. Each of us in this room is a leader in their own clinic, system, or community. This is our call to action. I was and maybe still am a reluctant leader. Once I became involved with the Academy there was no turning back. Get involved. Get your colleagues involved. The Academy and the patients we serve need your leadership and contributions in the collective voice of your Hospital system and communities. Thank you again for being an inspiration to me, and thank you for your service.