



Your Actions Today Impact the Years to Come

By Brynn Wright

On Halloween night, I sat at my desk with practice test questions on my computer and the Hiawatha Halloween parade playing on my phone beside me. I once again was filled with pride and love for my hometown. Watching the grand marshals (my former daycare providers nonetheless) and parade royalty coming down main street, I began reminiscing on the time I was crowned Halloween Queen, back in 2012. It's hard to believe that was seven years ago. I heard the announcer list what the contestants were judged on, and I began thinking about what I had written for my essay when I ran. The thought brought both passion and sadness. In my essay, I spoke about being born and raised in Brown County- a daughter of two 4th generation Brown County farmers. I spoke of my dream to become a doctor- to be there for my patients through all the ups and downs; to see the circle of life at work every day. This all brought joy as I reminisced. But one part of my essay brought sadness- the last part. The part where I told of my dream to come back to Hiawatha to practice. "To give back to the community that has given so much to me". As I thought about the state of our hospital and the hostility that has been present from both sides of the debate, I questioned: "Is the community that I loved still there, or have things changed?" "If I had been able to see into the future at the time I read that essay, would I have said it with as much passion as I did back then?"

Looking back and seeing how much has changed in the seven years since I was crowned Halloween Queen opened my eyes. I realized how quickly things change. Decisions and actions now effect the future, and we must constantly be looking with our eyes on the road ahead. In 2021 Dr. Julie Rosa will be leaving. In 2022, two more physician contracts will end. That is half of our physicians in the next three years. The entire face of HCH will be changing, and what it will be replaced with is determined by the here and now.

In medical school we are trained to plan our futures early. I have already been contacted by hospitals trying to recruit me. Medical schools tell students to be selective. The need for rural physicians is so great that it is not difficult for physicians to find jobs. We are advised to be firm when negotiating contracts. However, above all, we are told to look for a community that will be our new family- a community that fully supports us, the hospital, and the hospital's efforts. We are told to look for a place where the hospital and community work together to improve lives and constantly grow. With physician burnout rate at an all-time high, this- we are told- is the most important thing to look for when seeking a job.

Last spring, I was at a Rural Medicine Interest Group Meeting. We were discussing the struggles rural hospitals are facing financially, and the question that was posed was "What are the towns doing to keep their hospitals from going bankrupt?" The speaker replied by saying that many



were helping cover costs through sales tax. He proceeded to point out that Hiawatha was currently attempting to do that but was getting a lot of push-back from the community. Many of my fellow classmates interested in family medicine heard this. They heard it and made a note that Hiawatha is a town that does not support its hospital. News like that is an easy way to rule out places from the endless list of job opportunities we are given. If I had no ties to the community, I too would have marked it off my list. This year, the hospital was recruiting a resident that decided not to come to Hiawatha after hearing about the sales tax falling through. We are losing opportunities for our future. What we are doing now is impacting what Hiawatha Community Hospital will look like in just a year or two.

Mentors also give students the advice to never go to a practice alone. They suggest bringing at least one other colleague when starting. "Find a place that feels like home, and bring a friend, or two, or three." This is another way that both physicians and communities thrive. This is where it becomes so crucial to me that the community shows support of its hospital- however that may look. I have many wonderful colleagues both in residency and in school that I would love to work with and would love to help Hiawatha recruit. However, as a friend, I cannot tell colleagues that Hiawatha is the best place to work. How can I convince someone to work in a place where people are sending hate mail to my own family and putting "Vote No" flyers on vehicles in the hospital parking lot?

It has been difficult to watch my community go through this from a distance while I study to become a doctor and fight for rural medicine, but I am not going through it alone. Hiawatha currently has six graduates in medical school. In my Scholars in Rural Health (KU Med early acceptance program) class of 14 students, two of my classmates were from Sabetha and another was from Seneca. KU School of Medicine is full of Northeast Kansans passionate about medicine and serving others. I urge you to think about the future of our hospital. There are valid reasons on either side of the argument, but do not lose sight of where we are going. Your actions today impact the years to come. I do not want to look back seven years from now and wish our community could have seen the full picture. This community has raised me into the person I am today, and I hope that when I am looking for a place to work five years from now, I can still confidently say that I want to give back to the community that has given so much to me.