Being pregnant neonatologists creates a paradox: We have dedicated our lives to providing care that we hope our own babies will never need. As 2 neonatology fellows experiencing pregnancy together, we contemplate stories from our daily lives that reveal the breadth of pain and heartbreak that can haunt infancy. Faced with others’ suffering, we instinctively list reasons why we will not face the same plight: First, most babies are born healthy; second, only a minuscule fraction die soon after birth; and third, our perceptions are skewed by caring for the sickest newborns. Together we wonder, how can we acknowledge the risks we know exist while welcoming parenthood at the same time? How can we maintain our own hopes without distancing ourselves from our patients?

Oddly, the pandemic seems an answer to our questions (while raising many others). As coronavirus encompasses the world, uncertainty surrounds everyone. The pandemic might have divided us physically, but the opposite feels more powerful—the crisis unites us in spirit. This is an unprecedented event, and here we are, all in it together. No place, person, parent, or pregnancy is without new questions. We are unified by life’s fragility but also by our ability to find meaning and hope even in suffering and death.

One of us became pregnant during the pandemic. Initially, beginning a life amidst the chaos of coronavirus seemed outrageous, and the obstetrician recommended deferring trying. Too much was unknown. But each day, we go to work and encounter second-hand stories from our daily practices. We are reminded of the myriad complications that can affect pregnancy and parenthood. Was the risk posed by COVID-19 really so different? Choosing to have a child is a declaration that life is worth living despite uncertainty and suffering. And so, with both planning and luck, a pregnancy began.

Rather than separate ourselves from the situations that haunt our patients, we draw closer and learn from the hope and courage that takes root in the unlikeliest places. A couple holds their 2-week-old son who is suffering from metastatic cancer. They have just decided to focus on comfort rather than long-shot chemotherapy. The room feels lighter as his father cradles his head, riddled with subcutaneous tumors, and says, “When you get to heaven, please find grandpop and feed Cinnamon the cat.”

Later, a different father describes the joys of parenthood beside his daughter’s extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) circuit. Another infant’s mother embraces a gastrostomy tube change with hope and courage that takes root in the unlikeliest places. A couple holds their 2-week-old son who is suffering from metastatic cancer. They have just decided to focus on comfort rather than long-shot chemotherapy. The room feels lighter as his father cradles his head, riddled with subcutaneous tumors, and says, “When you get to heaven, please find grandpop and feed Cinnamon the cat.”

Birth anomalies, surgeries, out-of-the-blue enterocolitis, unexplained infections—taking refuge in the fact that the suffering we see is so very rare, so unlikely to happen to anyone we know, or to us, feels like a betrayal. Our patients and their families are living that one-in-a-thousand life. Even if focusing on rarity helps us cope with the unpredictability of our own pregnancies and of the world in pandemic, rarity cannot protect us from the truth that the terrible is possible. We cannot eliminate uncertainty for ourselves, nor for our patients’ parents. Trying to do so is fraudulent. Instead, we can reflect back the light that seeps from the darkest recesses. We can reassurance that love and hope alone make them good parents and bring meaning from them about the light of parenthood.

The pandemic reveals that we are united in our physical frailty and susceptibility to rare, tragic complications. Perhaps it can remind all doctors to be honest with patients about uncertainty but celebrate love and hope wherever they exist. By embracing light even in darkness, we can lift each other up as we face our common humanity.

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