

Athena's Adventures in Health Policy

KINDNESS IS COOL



By Ana Rita Gonzalez and Luisa Morales

Illustrated by Melina Sugliano

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: What is Health?	5
Chapter 2: Health Risks	11
Chapter 3: Health Equity	17
Chapter 4: Mental Health	23
Chapter 5: Mental Health Advocacy	32
Chapter 6: Live Healthy	40



CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS HEALTH?

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Athena’s pencil moved rapidly across her paper as she made note of Mrs. Beren’s question of the day. Written in block letters on the whiteboard were the words “What is health?” and Athena was determined to learn the answer.

On her right, her friend Conroy snored quietly. Athena poked him in the arm with the tip of her pencil. Wincing, he sat up and glared at her. She *knew* he was faking it.

“You’re being rude,” Athena hissed.

“This is boring,” Conroy returned.

Rolling her eyes, Athena silently observed the rest of her classmates. No one was excited about their health science class, and it showed. Hui’s textbook was open in front of her, but she wasn’t reading it—she was doodling on a sticky note. Next to her, their friend Zosia was getting a head start on her literature homework.

Athena sighed. She loved learning about physical activity, nutrition, and hygiene, but as her mom was constantly reminding her, she couldn’t make her friends enjoy the same things.

Papers rustled behind them as Mrs. Beren stood from her desk and made her way to the whiteboard. “Hope-

fully, you've all had plenty of time to consider today's question. Does anyone have any thoughts to share?"

Silence.

Athena racked her brain. *What is health? What is health?* It seemed like the answer should be very simple—but it wasn't.

Mrs. Beren waited, an amused smile on her face. At length, she said, "Hui, what do you think health is?"

Crumpling up her sticky note drawing, Hui sputtered, "Um, well, I think health is... the opposite of being sick."

Their science teacher nodded. "Okay, that's one way to look at it—but true health encompasses so much more than that." Turning to the whiteboard, she began to write. "Physical health is a combination of fitness, nutrition, and rest, while mental health allows us to process our thoughts and emotions in a constructive way. Then, there's social health. Does anyone know what that means?"

Athena raised her hand. "Social health is about our relationships with each other, isn't it?"

"That's correct. When we're socially healthy, we can develop trust and feel safe in our day-to-day lives." Mrs. Beren added these facts to the whiteboard, then faced the class again. "Now that we've defined *health*, I have a follow-up question for you all. What is *public* health?"

Immediately, Conroy's hand shot into the air. "Pu-

blic health means staying home when you're sick."

"That's certainly helpful," said Mrs. Beren, "but it's not everything. Public health includes disease prevention, promoting and protecting health, and treating disease in all people and all communities."

Athena grinned. Public health was her favorite topic. She loved it so much, in fact, that she was considering studying it in college.

Promoting and protecting health had become a passion project for her last year, when she was in sixth grade. She was already a vaccine advocate, so now, she wanted to find ways to help her community even more.

Raising her hand again, she asked, "Mrs. Beren, what are the biggest things that threaten health? I mean, what are the risks?"



CHAPTER 2: HEALTH RISKS

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Mrs. Beren smiled. “That’s an excellent question, Athena. Let’s discuss it.” Turning back to the whiteboard, she continued, “It’s important to note the difference between *health risks* and *public health risks*. Does anyone know the difference?”

Guessing, Athena said, “Health risks affect individuals, and public health risks affect whole communities.”

“Very good. Health risks may be things like a sedentary lifestyle, poor nutrition, tobacco use, and even genetics. Public health risks, on the other hand, have the potential to impact *everyone*. Does anyone know how we handle problems on that scale?”

Athena waited for one of her classmates to respond, but a hush had once again fallen over the room. Finally, she said, “The government creates health policies that give everyone the best choice to live a long, healthy life.”

“Exactly,” said Mrs. Beren. “And can anyone define what a health policy is?”

Now, here was something Athena’s friends could answer! She talked about health policies all the time.

“They’re rules made by governments to keep everyone

in a community healthy,” said Hui.

“Very good,” Mrs. Beren said, nodding. “So, let’s think about health policies in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Remember, older adults—like your grandparents—were at higher risk of hospitalization, intensive care, or a ventilator, and the immunocompromised were more likely to contract a severe case. For these reasons, public health policies dictated that everyone wear a mask, physically distance, and stay home when possible. We call that…”

“Prevention,” Conroy chimed in. Being immunocompromised himself, Conroy knew all about prevention.

Again, Mrs. Beren nodded. “Correct. Now, recall that in some cases, such as when preparing to travel, a COVID-19 test was necessary. What would we call that?”

“Screening,” said Athena.

“Great job!” Mrs. Beren said proudly. “I have a class full of public health experts.” The students laughed as she continued, “Remember that when vaccines became available, everyone was encouraged to get one for their protection and the protection of others. That was another health policy to keep the population safe and healthy.”

The room quieted again, this example leaving everyone deep in thought. Athena and her classmates remembered the COVID-19 pandemic well; it was unsettling for the entire world. Looking back, they understood the massive importance of public health policies. Without any guidelines to follow, the pandemic might

have gone on for a long, long time.

“What about mental health?” Mrs. Beren asked after a moment. “We have preventative policies for that, too. Can anyone name some of them?” When no one responded, she said, “Mental health policies tell us that it’s important to create strong leadership teams that value integrity and equal opportunity. We want everyone to be respected and appreciated, regardless of their abilities.”

Zosia raised her hand tentatively. “Mrs. Beren, do we have policies like this at school?”

“Absolutely,” Mrs. Beren replied. “Just like governments create policies to protect communities, schools create policies that promote health, including mental health. At our school, we use screening tools to help students and their parents understand certain behaviors and symptoms.”

Raising her hand again, Athena added, “We also have a crisis response plan, right?”

“That we do. Our response plan handles the safety and security of students and staff during emergencies. It helps us share necessary information and support the needs of teachers, students, and parents. It’s one of our most important policies.”

At that moment, the bell rang, directing students to their next class—but Athena’s mind was elsewhere.

As she crammed her science notebook into her backpack, she thought of the various scenarios Mrs. Beren

covered during her lesson. Pandemics, creating leadership teams, crisis response plans... It was a lot to think about before lunch.

But I would encounter these things every day as a public health expert, she thought. Suddenly, it felt like a huge responsibility. Maybe *too much* responsibility.

Do I have what it takes to help the world through health challenges?

She asked herself over and over as she walked to her next class.



CHAPTER 3: HEALTH EQUITY

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Many of the classrooms were still dark when Athena arrived at school the next morning. Rather than going to home-room, as she normally would, she yawned, took a sip of tea from her travel mug, and headed for the science lab to find Mrs. Beren.

The middle school felt different at this early hour—less chaotic, more inviting. If only Athena’s heart weren’t racing so she could enjoy it.

What if I can’t handle a career in public health?

It was all she could think about when she crawled into bed last night, and the horror she felt had kept her awake for hours. Her limbs felt restless, her mind cluttered. Yesterday morning, she thought she knew what she wanted to do with her life. Now, she wasn’t sure.

Athena believed in the power of health policy to better the world. But what if she wasn’t cut out for it? What if her efforts to help were never enough?

She rounded a corner and saw that the science lab was open. Relieved, Athena stepped inside and said, “Mrs. Beren? Are you in here?”

“Athena?” came Mrs. Beren’s voice from inside a storage closet. Stepping into the light, a stack of books

in her arms, she said, “You’re here awfully early. Is everything all right?”

“Here, let me help,” Athena said, taking half of the books and setting them on Mrs. Beren’s desk. Once they were situated, she explained, “I was hoping I could ask you a question about yesterday’s lesson on public health.”

“Of course. Have a seat.”

Athena took off her backpack, unzipped her jacket, and sat at the desk closest to Mrs. Beren’s. “It’s just... how can public health policies possibly reach the entire globe? Can everyone really be helped?”

Mrs. Beren smiled. “I admire your passion, Athena. It will be a great asset to the world—however you choose to use it.” Shuffling a few papers around her desk, she continued, “I think what you’re looking for is the concept of *equity*, which is different than equality. *Equity* provides access to what each person needs—and everyone needs something a little different.”

Athena nodded, considering. After a moment, she asked, “Okay, so, how can we practice health equity?”

“Well, take universal health coverage as an example,” said Mrs. Beren. “Assured access to healthcare doesn’t mean everyone receives the same medicine. It means everyone receives the personalized care they need. *That’s* health equity.”

“It leaves no one behind,” Athena noted.

“Exactly. Even simple things, like access to parks and

bike lanes, ensure that communities can practice prevention, promotion, and protection. Public health isn't always about global pandemics, Thea. Most of the time, it's about making small changes that benefit large numbers of people."

Athena sighed in relief, happy she decided to arrive early. She knew her science teacher would have some words of wisdom for her. Maybe she could have a career in public health after all. "Thank you, Mrs. Beren. I needed to hear that."

"It's my pleasure. If you decide to pursue a career in public health, remember that you won't have to save the world on your first day. You'll join a global team of experts who are already hard at work. Your role will be unique to you, and you'll touch many lives—but you won't have to do it alone."

The bell rang, causing Athena's heart to leap. Was it time for homeroom already? "Thanks again, Mrs. Beren. I'll see you in class tomorrow."



CHAPTER 4: MENTAL HEALTH

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For the next hour, Athena felt as though she were walking on a cloud. Her dream had been returned to her, safe and sound. Nothing could bring her down today.

Except Hui, standing in the hallway, crying.

Without asking questions, Athena hugged her friend tightly, the straps of her backpack digging into her shoulders.

What's going on here? Athena thought, but she waited patiently for Hui to speak.

After a moment, Hui's breathing slowed, and she pulled back to meet Athena's eyes. "I have to tell you something," she whispered.

Pulling Hui onto the nearest bench, Athena said, "Of course—anything."

Hui took a deep breath and wiped the tears from her cheeks. Still whispering, she explained, "Yesterday, after school, I was diagnosed with anxiety."

A shiver ran down Athena's spine. One of her closest friends had anxiety—but how? And why didn't Athena notice before?

"I told my guidance counselor that I feel anxious all the time, and she referred me to a psychiatrist. She's

the one who diagnosed me.”

Early detection, Athena thought. The guidance counselors were often the first to bring attention to students’ mental health. It was one of many policies that made her feel safe at school.

“I start therapy in a week,” Hui continued, tearing up again, “and I might have to take anti-anxiety medication.”

Treatment. Athena was so relieved to hear that Hui would be receiving treatment.

“Oh, Thea,” Hui moaned, hiding her face in her hands. “What if our classmates find out and make fun of me?”

“Come here,” Athena said, hugging her friend again. “This conversation is going to stay between us, okay? I’m so sorry—I had no idea you were so anxious. If I had, I would’ve done whatever I could to help.”

“I know,” Hui whispered, sniffing.

Athena took a deep breath and added, “I’m so proud of you for meeting with a psychiatrist. Therapy could make a difference for you, right? Imagine how much better you’ll feel once you’ve talked some things out.”

Hui sighed. “I guess so. Thanks, Thea.”

“Of course. Are you ready to go to class?”

Nodding, Hui stood, brushed her bangs out of her eyes, and straightened the wrinkles out of her skirt. Then, she took another deep breath, and the girls entered their social studies classroom together.

The noise level of their peers—*loud*—made no sense

until Athena saw that Mrs. Huette hadn't arrived yet. And though Hui made her way quickly to her desk in the front row, it was only a matter of time before random chatter became concentrated whispering.

What's wrong with Hui?

It looks like she's been crying.

That's so embarrassing.

Crying is for little kids.

Athena's anger flared as Hui sniffled beside her—she was crying again.

"Thea," came Zosia's quiet voice from behind them. "What's going on?"

But there was no time to respond. Athena couldn't sit by and let her friend cry for the rest of class. She would just have to take Hui back into the hallway until she calmed down again. Rising from her desk, Athena tapped Hui's shoulder to get her attention—and then Mrs. Huette entered the room.

The moment stretched long as their social studies teacher silently assessed the situation. Hui sniffing, Athena standing, Zosia looking on with concern—and their classmates snickering behind their backs.

"Hui and Athena," said Mrs. Huette, stone-faced, "please follow me into the hallway."

Trembling, Hui stood. Athena took her hand, and together, they joined Mrs. Huette outside the classroom. The door closed with a *click*, blocking out the sound of their classmates' chatter.

“All right, girls,” their teacher said, gently now. “What’s the trouble?”

Hui brushed the tears from her cheeks as Mrs. Huette handed her a tissue. But when she spoke, her voice was barely audible. “It’s nothing. I’m fine. We can go back in now.”

“Not so fast,” Mrs. Huette said. “I got an email from your mom this morning, Hui. How are you feeling after yesterday’s events?”

Hui cringed. “I’ve been better.”

“I can imagine. Did one of your classmates say something that made you feel anxious?”

Shaking her head, Hui said, “I don’t know how I feel right now. They made fun of me for crying. I think I should’ve just stayed home today.”

Mrs. Huette smiled, though her eyes looked sad. “I have a different idea. Today, I’m going to teach a lesson on diversity and inclusion. Would you like to stay and listen?”

Slowly, Hui nodded.

“Good. Let’s see if we can teach your classmates a little something about kindness, okay?”

“Okay,” Hui agreed.

“Athena,” said Mrs. Huette, “would you please walk with Hui to the restroom so she can get cleaned up? I think it will help her feel better.”

“Of course,” Athena replied. And wrapping an arm around her friend’s shoulder, she guided her down the hall.

When the girls returned to class, Mrs. Huette's lesson had already begun. The other students were silent, attentive. Athena wondered if they'd been reprimanded for their behavior toward Hui. She would have to ask Zosia later.

As Athena took her seat, Mrs. Huette said, "Diversity means that we're all different. We look, speak, think, feel, and behave differently—and there are policies indicating that these differences should be embraced with empathy. Does anyone know what those policies are called?"

Tentatively, Hui raised her hand. "Anti-discrimination policies?" she guessed.

Mrs. Huette smiled. "Correct. Sometimes, to implement anti-discrimination policies, public awareness campaigns are run to teach the public about different illnesses and issues. There are also specific training programs for caretakers, so they know how best to support all kinds of people."

Turning to face the whiteboard, Mrs. Huette continued, "Let's define *inclusion*. I'll tell you what it *doesn't mean*, and then someone can tell me what it *does* mean. Inclusion is *not* being kind only to our best friends." She wrote this on the board, then faced the class again, waiting.

Raising her hand, Athena said, "Inclusion means

providing equal access to everyone.”

Mrs. Huette nodded as she wrote this answer on the board. “Exactly. Resources and opportunities aren’t for ‘perfect’ people. There are no ‘perfect’ people. We are all unique, and that’s what makes life so special.”

Zosia raised her hand, and Athena turned to find that her friend looked quite confused. “But Mrs. Huette,” she said, “if we’re all so different, how will we ever understand each other?”

“It takes practice,” Mrs. Huette replied. “We must be able to listen *and* share our feelings to become truly compassionate, empathetic people.” After a moment, the teacher added, “I want to make it very clear that bullying will not be tolerated in my classroom. You’re all familiar with our school’s code of conduct and anti-bullying policies, but I’m going to pass out new copies for you to review. I expect each of you to adhere to these guidelines. Is that understood?”

The entire class nodded as the school policies were distributed. Athena looked down at hers and read:

- 1. Every student and teacher is worthy of respect and kindness.*
- 2. Think before you speak. Think before you act.*
- 3. When in conflict, use your words. If you need assistance, ask a teacher for help.*
- 4. Your words are powerful. Use them to encourage one another.*

5. If you are concerned about yourself or a classmate, speak to your guidance counselor.

6. If you experience or witness bullying on school grounds, report it to a teacher.

Shifting her gaze over to Hui, Athena noticed that her eyes weren't on the policies but on the whiteboard. Hui read and reread the definitions of diversity and inclusion, committing them to memory. Her eyes were still red from crying, but she looked steadier now—more hopeful. By the time the lunch bell rang, there was a tiny smile on her face.

Athena, Hui, and Zosia walked to the cafeteria together, their voices low as they filled Zosia in on everything she'd missed. The second she heard about Hui's diagnosis, she stopped in her tracks and gave her a hug.

"Oh, Hui," Zosia whispered. "I didn't know. I'm so sorry."

Hui laughed. "That's okay, Zo. I didn't know either."

As the girls carried their lunch trays to the table where Conroy was already seated, Athena heard someone mumble, "There's Crybaby Hui."

"Excuse me?" Athena turned to find the source of the voice and saw Rainier, a boy from their social studies class. He was looking at his sandwich, smiling as if he hadn't said anything. But it was too late for that. "Is there something you'd like to say to Hui?"

Rainier did not respond. Athena's eyes roved the

cafeteria for a teacher—until she felt Hui’s hand on her arm.

“Don’t, Thea,” Hui whispered. “Just let it go. I don’t want to make a scene.”

“Someone should tell a teacher,” Athena argued. “It’s school policy.”

“Please, Thea. Let’s go sit with Conroy.”

With a deep breath, Athena said, “Fine.” But deep down, she knew she had some research to do when she got home.



CHAPTER 5: MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY

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For the remainder of the week, Athena spent her free time researching mental health advocacy. She had become a vaccine advocate to help Conroy, who was diabetic, and now, she wanted to help Hui.

While browsing for potential opportunities, Athena discovered just the thing: a mental health awareness walk. It was taking place in her town the next weekend, so she would have to act quickly.

Opening a new tab on her laptop, she drafted an email to Mrs. Beren and Mrs. Huette. Would they be interested in creating a school team to participate in the awareness campaign? Athena sent her email, closed her laptop, and hurried downstairs for dinner.

A couple of hours later, when she refreshed her inbox, Mrs. Huette had already replied.

I love this idea! Let's do it!

Athena smiled. She couldn't wait to tell Hui.

At school on Monday, Athena found signup sheets for the mental health awareness walk outside Mrs. Huette's

and Mrs. Beren’s classrooms. She, Hui, Conroy, and Zosia were the first to write down their names.

“This is so exciting!” Zosia said, giving Hui a hug. “I’m so happy our town puts on events like this.”

“Me too,” said Hui. “It makes me feel less alone, you know?”

As her friends chatted, Athena watched skeptically as Rainier, the bully from their social studies class, wrote his name on the signup sheet. Zosia’s voice fell to a whisper as he walked past them and down the hall.

“Why would he sign up? He was so mean last week.”

Athena shrugged. “Maybe he feels sorry.”

By Friday, more than twenty students had committed to raising awareness. Every time she walked past the signup sheets, Hui turned to her friends and said, “I just can’t believe this many people care about mental health.” She looked happier than she had in weeks.

Athena couldn’t wait to participate in her first mental health advocacy event. After discussing it with Mrs. Huette and Mrs. Beren, they determined that their team would be advocating specifically for school- and community-based services for children and adolescents. This would mean improved school staffing and resources for mental health, including social workers, counseling and therapy, and a better referral system—all things that would benefit students like Hui.

“This is the nicest thing anyone has ever done for me,” she said the night before the event. “Thank you, Thea.”

Bright and early on Saturday morning, Athena, Hui, their classmates, and their teachers took a bus to the community park, where the awareness walk was to take place. A long table had been set up on the grounds, the whole thing covered in blue t-shirts. Bold lettering on the front read, "There is no health without mental health."

Athena picked up a shirt and pulled it on over her jacket. The autumn air was chilly, but she knew she would warm up as she walked.

"The starting line is right over there," said one of the event volunteers, pointing to a path a few meters away. Mrs. Beren pulled her t-shirt over her coat and gestured for everyone to follow her in that direction.

As the walk began, Athena felt a sense of belonging envelop her. Not only was she standing side-by-side with her peers and mentors, but she was bonding with the rest of her community as well. Their common goal of raising awareness around mental health propelled her forward, toward the front of the pack. Hui, Conroy, and Zosia had to hurry to keep up.

Every so often, Athena looked over her shoulder at their fellow classmates. Their hair was windblown, their breath appearing as clouds in the autumn air. But they were smiling, too. They seemed just as happy as Athena to be making a difference in their town.

That was, everyone except Rainier. He was walking behind the other students, his hands stuffed in the pockets of his jacket. Staring at the ground, he shuffled along the gravel trail in silence.

So be it, Athena thought. She couldn't figure out why Rainier decided to sign up. And besides—she was here to focus on Hui.

Taking her friend's hand, Athena said, "Is this everything you hoped it would be?"

Hui smiled. "I think it's better. I didn't know they were going to give us shirts."

Athena laughed. "I just hope we still feel this good in three miles."

"I bet I can beat you all to the finish line," Conroy said, jogging beside them.

"But it's not a race," Zosia reminded him.

Conroy shrugged. "Afraid to lose, Zo?"

"Focus, people," Hui said, giggling.

In the end, they all crossed the finish line together—and it was exhilarating. Athena could hardly believe how easy it was to walk a few miles for a good cause. She watched in rapture as hundreds of other people from her community completed the trail. It was encouraging, knowing that so many others cared about public health.

She took a long drink from her water bottle and headed for the soccer field, where a band was playing. Hui walked beside her, saying little, but feeling much. Athena could tell that her friend was deeply moved by this

outpouring of community support.

Together with Conroy and Zosia, Athena and Hui found a spot on the field to sit and listen to the concert. None of them recognized the band, but the songs were nice, and they were soon swaying in time with the music. Athena was just noticing how hungry she was when a figure approached on her left—Rainier.

Hui stiffened. Why was he walking in their direction? With only a few paces between them, he stopped and said, “Hey, is it okay if I sit with you?”

Athena, Conroy, and Zosia all looked at Hui. She had every right to ask him to sit somewhere else—but she didn’t. Instead, she smiled and said, “Of course.”

Eyes on the ground, Rainier shuffled over to sit next to Hui. After a moment’s pause, he said, “I’m really sorry about last week. I shouldn’t have made fun of you like that.”

For a while, Hui was silent. The band finished a song and started up another. Then, partway through the chorus, Hui asked Rainier, “Why *did* you make fun of me?”

He sighed, shifting on the turf. “I was diagnosed with anxiety a few months ago. Now, I’m working on processing my feelings in a healthy way. Seeing you cry... It made me feel less alone. That freaked me out, so I called you names. It was wrong, and I’m sorry.”

Athena watched as a smile spread across Hui’s face. “I forgive you,” she said. “And... I understand. I have anxiety, too.”

“Wait... really?” Rainier looked at Hui in amazement. “But you’re so calm!”

Hui laughed. “Sometimes—on the outside. But my insides feel messy.”

“Oh, I get that,” Rainier said, nodding. “Sometimes, it feels like I’ll never get my thoughts under control.”

Hui was nodding, too. “Yes, I feel like that all the time. I guess neither of us is alone, huh?”

By the end of the concert, Hui and Rainier were friends. It was like magic—they were already discussing future advocacy events and how they might participate. Athena looked on in amazement.

This must be the empathy that Mrs. Huette was talking about in class, she thought. By listening to each other, Hui and Rainier had not only resolved their differences but bonded over their similarities.

During the final song, Hui stood up and started dancing. Athena joined her, then Zosia, then Conroy. Reluctantly, Rainier stood, stuffing his hands into the pockets of his jacket. “I’ll see you guys at school,” he said, turning to leave.

“Wait!” said Hui, grabbing his sleeve. “We’re all having lunch at Athena’s house. Do you want to come?”

Rainier looked sheepishly at Athena, who smiled and said, “Yes, please come. It’s going to be fun.”

“Okay,” Rainier said. “If you insist.”

“We do,” said Hui. And she danced until the music stopped.



CHAPTER 6: LIVE HEALTHY

CHAPTER 6: LIVE HEALTHY

At school on Monday morning, Mrs. Beren shared the many photos she took during the mental health awareness walk. Athena grinned as the faces of her classmates appeared on the projector, just as she remembered them in her mind's eye. Everyone looked so happy on Saturday, forever impacted by the opportunity to advocate for children like Hui, Rainier, and many others.

This was the power of public health, Athena thought—to bring communities together for the common goals of prevention, promotion, protection, and treatment. There was no telling how their efforts would ripple out into the world.

“You should all be very proud,” Mrs. Beren said, turning off the projector. “If you’d like any of these photos, see me after class. I’m happy to email them to you.”

Athena framed a photo of Hui and herself from the event and hung it on her bedroom wall, right above her desk. They were both wearing their mental health awareness t-shirts, dancing, and laughing on the soccer

field. It was Athena's new favorite memory with her friend.

As she reflected on the past few weeks, she acknowledged that she didn't know exactly what the future held for her. But she did know one thing.

Athena wanted to continue helping her friends feel better. There was nothing like it in the whole world.

You can practice health policy just like Athena. Remember to advocate for health equity and equality so that each person has access to what they need, and no one is left behind.

Each country has its own mental health hotline, and the phone number is easy to find online. If you or a loved one is struggling, don't hesitate to call your national hotline for support and encouragement.

Writing this series of storybooks is a dream come true and is more rewarding than I ever could have imagined. I want kids of all ages to know that working in health policy is as viable as becoming a doctor, an architect, a teacher, or a farmer.

Thank you so much to my teammates for helping me conceptualize and write each book; to our amazing editor, Aquinnah Bree; and to our talented illustrators, Melina Sugliano and Rodrigo Palacios. In creating this series, we have also created a lifelong bond.

*- Ana Rita Gonzalez, President & CEO,
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When her friend Hui is diagnosed with anxiety, Athena sets out to learn more about mental health. Presented with the opportunity to participate in an awareness campaign, she's quick to sign up. But not everyone in Athena's class is equally supportive. Can she and Hui teach their school about the importance of empathy?

Through Athena's Adventures in Health Policy, Policy Wisdom aims to inspire the next generation of public health professionals and show them the importance and impact of health policies.

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