

DMS Class Day 2009

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Medical Student Speech

We've come along way, together -- gently pushed and pulled by friends and family, encouraged by our professors, attendings, residents, nurses, patients and ultimately on our own, in those long dark nights willing ourselves to learn more or just stay awake holding those retractors. We've danced for a dream all the way to Africa and back, channeled the spirit of Albert Schweitzer, tried to be good neighbors and gotten to see most of America on "the trail". And now we're here.

Almost four years ago, for our white coat ceremony, we created our own mission statement to guide us through medical school. It is thoughtful, reflective and idealistic, like I hope most of us still are. We wrote:

We, the class of 2009, commit to humbly serve our world through medicine. United in our desire to become outstanding physicians and to grow as people, we pledge to respect and support one another. We will work hard, knowing that our abilities depend on our diligence. We will enjoy the journey, remembering that we will take better care of others when we are mindful of our own well-being. Together, we commit to a lifetime of service, education, and growth.

With fellowship, gratitude, and joy, we commit to medicine.

After only 3 and a half more years of medical school (which doesn't sound so long), almost 1000 hours of lectures, many hours with a microscope, in anatomy and pathology lab, hundreds of DMEDs entries

(perhaps thousands for some!), the joy of sitting for hours on end studying for quizzes, exams and the thrill of 8 hour boards, the rush of remembering to wash your hands after leaving the OSCE, and the lifetime lived in each different clinical clerkship, we are now on the brink of being called doctors.

I said I would talk about change, and this has been a good year for changes. I can't presume to know how each of you has grown in these 4 years, but I do know that we have all made it here. We've all climbed this mountain, and like Paul Farmer and Nelson Mandela we now see the mountains beyond, the first made of moving boxes, and the next looking a little like Mount Doom. I think we know we are all changed, deep down we now know we all have the basic skills needed for the next climb. We may not know all the details, but we know how and where to get that information, we all have a way to manage our time, our multiple tasks, and have some way to restore ourselves in even the toughest rotation. Most of all we've had a chance to explore different paths, to find the one in which we can channel the drive and the passion that first made us first hurl ourselves on mount MCAT.

While the climb has been difficult, I feel lucky to have been here at Dartmouth with you. Some of us, like myself, came on a winding road, while others have been green for years. Regardless of where we came from I think we all found a unique medical school that has allowed us to fulfill our pledge to "work hard", but also "to enjoy the journey". Our class has been big enough to find close friends, yet small enough to know everyone. Our lectures were big enough to get lost in blitzmail, small enough to always email any prof directly. From admissions to student affairs and financial aid we've had more people working for us than I think most of us realize. And while the school's motto may be "vox

clamantis in deserto" – a voice crying out in the wilderness, I think we have all found mentors and friends, master clinicians, who have helped us find our way, who have shared with us some of the challenges and joys of our chosen specialties, and who've forced us to stop and enjoy the view occasionally. And despite the hardship ahead, I hope that we will all be able to remember the image of Joe, Bill and Jim – our three wise humanists, all in blue shirts, reminding us that the "secret of the care of the patient, is caring for the patient."¹

As we leave medical school we are not leaving a community behind, but joining a larger one. Many of us have benefited directly from alumni generosity, and one fine day we too may have the chance and ability to give back, to inspire another generation of idealistic medical students "who would cure the world."

Even as interns though I think we have a lot to contribute. With the way we treat our patients and our medical students we can immediately start becoming the change we would like to see in the world. This will take courage, as high as we feel today, we all know that in many ways we will be starting again.

"Life is short, and Art long; the crisis fleeting; experience perilous, and decision difficult. "²

Hippocrates seems to sum up internship quite well. But the aphorism continues:

"The physician must not only be prepared to do what is right himself, but also to make the patient, the attendants, and externals cooperate."³

¹ Original quote attributed to Francis Peabody

² Hippocrates Aphorisms, translated by Francis Adams, <http://classics.mit.edu/Hippocrates/aphorisms.1.i.html>

³ *ibid.*

We know we will work in systems – complex, hierarchical and sometimes bizarre. Changing these, improving, healing these systems is part of our work too. In these systems, the decisions will be difficult, and often argued about, but we are lucky – we have the heart of medicine – the care of the patient – as an anchor which can always guide us – and make doctors, nurses, pharmacists, administrators, and social workers into a team focused on health, on life.

As much as we or others may argue for that exotic diagnosis, that exciting procedure if it does not benefit the patient we can let those go – that is the Dartmouth way. There will be times for rapid decisive action and we have been taught that, and there will be time when we should “not just do something, but stand there” and let the patient heal, and we have been taught that too.

As an African Dutch Canadian guy married to a Finnish Canadian girl with 2 American children I am very grateful that we chose to commit to serving our whole WORLD. We know we are privileged to here, to be trained here at a medical school and a hospital with so many resources. And we know it is a privilege to become doctors.

Internship is likely to force us all into short-term thinking, but once we can breathe and look up, we will have the chance to change the world, to help heal societies too, if we only look – a lesson which our new college president Jim Kim is likely, thru example, to keep reminding us of.

So as you start to get bored in your second or third year, when you know it all, remember there is a world out there – in Africa, India, Russia, in our urban centers, in our reservations, where people are dying for

someone with your skills. Go! You are needed, you can do so much good, you can change the world. Speak to Katie Ratzan or Katie Noyes if you need more information.

So today, we become doctors, ready or not. I hope that the responsibility makes us worthy, that the fears we will face in the coming years will force us to know more and not overwhelm us. I hope the intensity of the years ahead will be balanced by the privilege we have of participating intimately in all the lives of those for whom we will care.

May your voice cry out for those who are suffering, may it be heard by all of us here, may we change the world together.

In fellowship, gratitude, and joy, I am deeply honored to commit with you today to a lifetime of medicine.