

Chancellor Michael F. Collins 50th Commencement remarks

June 4, 2023

There is a simple truth: Nursing, science and medicine at its best is what our graduates represent!

We come together today at our 50th Commencement to celebrate their many accomplishments.

It is a privilege for me, for the sixteenth time, to welcome the family, friends and graduates of the three schools of UMass Chan Medical School to a commencement celebration.

Today, at a ceremony with some parts solemn and all parts joyous, we gather on the threshold of the future of the health professions.

It was not that long ago, although to some it may seem like forever, that you came to Worcester to embark upon the next chapter of your professional journey. Nervous anticipation accompanied the well-earned confidence merited by your accomplishments, accolades and miles traveled.

Yes, there were tests and practicums; there were clinical rotations and complex scientific experiments; there were long days and longer nights; personal growth, professional challenges; and there were moments to forget, but *many* more you will remember for the rest of your lives.

Today, all of you are bound by an unmistakable realization that you have been changed by your time at this medical school and by once unimaginable challenges.

Throughout our time together, we have been guided by a mission to change the course of the history of disease.

Yet, these past few years, one disease, caused by a virus, has changed not only the course of history but the course of your academic journeys.

While there was great hope in your expectations of what the future would behold, in full honesty, few could have predicted what was yet to unfold: the real became virtual; public health measures upended societal norms; and the noble truths of science and medicine were clouded by uninformed conjecture.

Before we knew it, we isolated to protect ourselves and others: we covered our smiles with masks; our hearts with gowns; and our hands with gloves.

On your first days, you (and your parents) may remember, I encouraged you always to hold the hands of your patients with esteem.

Indeed, you have.

When the lonely needed your presence, you kept them company.

When the demand for life-saving vaccines overwhelmed our capacity to get shots into arms, you stepped forward to staff vaccination sites.

In the very earliest days of your careers, you served on wards, in tents, arenas, conference centers and at your neighbors' doors to ensure that the tenets of our professional oaths shone forth. So began your lifelong commitment of service to others!

Through simple acts of kindness, you demonstrate your humanity and exemplify what is best about the healing professions.

Carry forth into your careers the hard-earned wisdom of recent times.

Revel and appreciate the pace and wonder of science that before our eyes improves and brings hope to the human condition.

Always be mindful that ours is a global community and recognize that success against disease at home should be of little solace when that same disease ravages our global neighbors.

With emboldened wisdom, let us promote the human dignity of each citizen of the world; for that is our true calling.

Guided by these professional callings, let us identify and dismantle those structures, practices, traditions and embedded biases that perpetuate inequities in our health care delivery system and research practices.

Let us reinforce the essential elements of compassionate and humanistic patient care and research.

Have confidence that your toil—in the lab, on the ward or at your patient’s bedside—matters.

In your bright futures, when you recount to your children and grandchildren your memories of this time, do so with humility. Recall your self-sacrifice but also the grief and heavy burden faced by some solely because of the inequities in our midst.

Recall how in every hour of every day, good people like yourselves, came together in spirit and support, recognizing that human connection is essential to our collective well-being.

Let us, literally and figuratively, close any distance between us.

There will be moments when all medical interventions have been exhausted; in those moments, please remember that the greatest privilege of your career *may* be found during the time you spend holding the hand of your patient.

There may be times when you feel depleted, frustrated, overwhelmed, or see colleagues who are so burdened. Offer comfort to those traveling a similar professional path.

Be sustained, too, by the comfort and connection with your family and friends.

Please know of the privilege it has been for all who have been the stewards of your education to see you grow and prosper as our junior-most colleagues.

Each of us has taken an oath to educate those who follow us in our professions. This is a sacred obligation to which now we welcome *you* to join us in fulfilling.

Remember, the professional journey you have chosen will provide you with a valuable and meaningful platform from which you can serve others.

Like Tania Semaan, will you endeavor to devote yourselves to the lives of individuals, families, or a nation’s entire population, by responding with your time, talent and treasure to the needs of the most vulnerable among us?

Like Luke O'Neil, will your keen intellect propel you to generate new knowledge; discover novel therapeutics; and become a trusted voice and advocate for public health?

Like Katie Couric, will the sincerity of your convictions and the tenacity of your efforts bring to millions of others the resiliency and hope that accompanies research and elevates the human condition?

The experiences you will encounter and the decisions that you will make in the days and years ahead shall be with you for a lifetime.

During the trying and triumphant moments of your career, please know of the enduring pride that UMass Chan Medical School shall have in calling you one of our own!

As you leave this green and embark upon your exciting careers, never let the mask, gown or gloves come between you and those for whom it will be your privilege to care.

Congratulations and Godspeed along your professional journey!