

Terence R. Flotte, MD

The Celia and Isaac Haidak Professor of Medical Education

Executive Deputy Chancellor

Provost and Dean of the School of Medicine

Remarks

School of Medicine Commencement

March 31, 2020

For the first time in the history of UMass Medical School, you, the MD class of 2020, are receiving your degrees two months earlier than previously planned, enabling you to join the ranks of those who are dedicated to the service of their fellow men and women. Never before have we needed you more to join our ranks as healers and leaders of health care teams.

Yours is a vocation, a calling, to serve your fellow human beings in their moments of greatest need. To be for your patients and families *what they* need you to be. Not what you want to be, but what *they* need you to be. That is our commitment, and that is the core element of the oath that you will soon take. In this way, even in ordinary times, the role of the physician in society is special.

. . . But these are *not* ordinary times. In fact, they are the most extraordinary of times. As all of you know, our nation and our world are faced with a global pandemic of historic proportions. The acute outbreak of COVID-19 threatens to overwhelm the capacity of our health systems. And so, the Chancellor has taken the unprecedented step of conferring your degrees two months early and the Board of Registration of Medicine has streamlined their process to grant limited medical licenses, freeing you up for service, if you choose to render that service to the commonwealth or elsewhere in our nation.

As you also know, you have already matched to your internships and residencies, indicating that both we and the programs to which you are going as interns in July recognize that you have completed this phase of your learning and are ready to move to the next level, as resident physicians.

It is with 100 percent confidence that I say to all of you that you are, in fact, ready. The hospital teams that you will join include many of the same physician-educators that have taught you so far. They know you; they know your skills and your limitations. They know how much you can help.

This moment is rightly called a crisis. But as President John F. Kennedy pointed out, in every crisis there is an opportunity. And as this is a great crisis, it comes with a great opportunity. An opportunity to draw upon strengths and talents that you may not have realized that you had.

Part of that opportunity is the opportunity to serve now in these coming weeks as the surge of new COVID-19 cases moves through our community here in Massachusetts. This is a historic opportunity to serve and to learn, just as the HIV epidemic was to my generation.

The broader opportunity, we hope, is to take that learning and strength that will emerge as our community emerges from this pandemic, to create a health system that is more nimble, more flexible, more able to anticipate and react to the possibilities of other pandemics in our future.

But in this moment, today, we celebrate your successes over the past four years. We are inspired by your incredible intelligence, diligence and idealism. You are our hope, you are our future. We do not expect you to be perfect. But we know that you will put forth the full efforts of your minds and hearts.

As Winston Churchill said in another moment of global crisis: "Success is not final, failure is not fatal, it is the courage to continue that counts."

We know that you will find that courage within yourselves. We are so incredibly proud of you!
Congratulations! And all the best!