

Chancellor Michael F. Collins
UMass Medical School Commencement Address
June 3, 2018

It is filled with a sense of gratitude that I stand before you this day to extend all best wishes as we send you on your way to professions in service to others.

Those of us who have had the privilege to serve as stewards of your education are filled with appreciation that you are accepting the awesome responsibility to make the needs of others your life's calling.

I expect and hope that you are filled with excitement as you are joined by family and friends to celebrate your individual accomplishments. Those feelings of exhilaration and delight accompanied you at many times along your journey to this moment.

There were letters of acceptance; great testing grades; experiments, with results that surprised and brought an enormous sense of satisfaction; and moments together as classmates that have created memories that will last a lifetime.

While these were important individual accomplishments so, too, were there moments when you served someone in abundant need.

You sat on the side of the bed and held a child's hand when they were scared.

You took the extra time to listen, one more time, to the story of an elderly patient, never signaling that you had heard it many times before.

You encouraged a colleague whose experiment had not gone as expected and you were correct, that all would be fine with time.

You taught those who could learn from your intellect.

You partnered with those who share complementary interprofessional interests.

You insisted that excellence and integrity were your ideals and that compassion was your calling.

So how else could one feel but filled with gratitude that our professions will now be bettered by outstanding individuals like you, imbued with the examples of your professors and mentors and motivated by the needs of those you will serve?

That you recognize the privilege that has been given to you brings even more appreciation.

But while the sine wave of emotion has a slope of great positivity at this moment, we know that our professions are challenged by many impersonal barriers that come between us and those we serve.

You will be exhorted at times to focus on work units, which have become a proxy for the effectiveness and efficiency of a practitioner's efforts, but bring relatively little value to patients. Rebuff such admonitions and focus with full intensity on tender loving care.

Our desire to care for others is what drew us to our professions.

It is what motivates our daily interactions with those for whom we care and our determination to identify cures; what brings us greatest satisfaction; and, what defines us as professionals.

These days, a little child who plays doctor or nurse or scientist no longer wears their parent's oversized white shirt as their white coat; no longer puts a plastic mirror on their forehead; no longer taps the knee with a plastic hammer; and no longer listens to the chest with a little toy stethoscope.

Today, the child playing clinician holds a computer, sits looking at it intently and rarely engages with his or her playmate.

While technology has improved many aspects of patient care, only a caregiver can sense when a patient needs a little something more: a moment to compose themselves; a tender touch that characterizes meaningful moments of engagement; and compassion that promotes their human dignity.

With sincerest gratitude that you will be our colleagues long into the future, let me encourage you to practice and conduct science with the unbridled enthusiasm that brought you to our professions. Show us, through your example, that each day can be filled with activity that brings you fulfillment, for in so doing, you will be assured that you direct most of your energy towards patient satisfaction and professional gratification.

Take a moment each day to hold the hands of those whose care is entrusted to you.

Do not be afraid to hold the hand of a colleague, when you, or they, are in need.

Be assured that the hands of those who come before you in our professions are available to support you; and when all medical, nursing and scientific expertise has been applied, please know that there may come the time when simple acts of kindness and touch represent the greatest care you can provide.

Please acknowledge that there are those less fortunate who will need you in most difficult times. They live in our neighborhoods and they look to us from across the globe. It is with gratitude that they will be comforted by you; and you will be filled with gratitude, for coming to know them.

Like Marion Broome, may you experience the gratitude of a grateful patient, or of an entire profession, as you care for those most in need and teach those who shall come behind you in your profession.

Like Cyrus Poonawalla, may you experience the gratitude of millions of people, because you put the needs of others before those of your own and assure, through every fiber of your being, that no person shall go in need of a treatment that could save their life.

Like Huda Zoghbi, may you experience the gratitude of children and their parents, as you apply the knowledge you have gained and act, through the discoveries of your science, with a generosity of spirit to change the course of history of disease.

With the gratitude of a grateful institution, remember always that we shall take great pride in knowing you as one of our own.

Congratulations!