



Reflections for the Next Generation of Physicians

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The new academic year is starting at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health—in a way. Our most important work—taking care of patients—and the two synergistic academic missions of research and teaching continue year-round on a 24/7 schedule. Still, the recent arrival of our new Class of 2015 and the upcoming White Coat Ceremony, in which we officially welcome our new medical students into the profession, serve as important calendar events celebrating the annual rejuvenation of academic medicine. This is also an opportune time to pause and reflect on the proverbial “big picture.”

What thoughts should we share with the newest recruits? First and foremost, we should commend them on their wise decision to become physicians, and congratulate them on their success in gaining admission. The level of competition has become incredibly intense, even as the number of positions has increased at our school and across the country. This year we received nearly 4000 applications for our available positions, and even though we have continued to expand our class size, this year’s class of 175 students represents one of the most selective cohorts in the 104-year history of our school.

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Our new students bring a remarkably diverse array of talents, experiences, and backgrounds. Individually and collectively, they are the kind of colleagues we need in our field. Even more important, they will become the kind of clinicians we want to have caring for ourselves, our families, and our neighbors.

It is easy for all of us, as we confront on a daily basis the emerging challenges in the health care arena, to lose sight of the fact that the practice of medicine is more exciting than ever. We continue to see amazing translations of basic and clinical science into new and more effective ways of diagnosing and treating disease—and more than ever, into the identification and modification of risk factors as we seek to prevent disease. It is also extremely encouraging that more institutions have begun to embrace an integrated model in which public health and preventive approaches are melded into the traditional focus on the diagnosis and treatment of disease in individual patients. At the same time, the growing emphasis on quality, safety, and interdisciplinary models of care will have a huge impact on our ability to make a difference in the lives of the people and communities we serve.

At the same time, we should not sugar-coat the very real issues confronting us. We still have health disparities that are inexcusable in any fair-minded society. We must make some tough choices in the allocation of resources, which will continue to be restricted. Those tough choices should be

shaped by a sense of equity and social good. Also, we have a long way to go before we can take full advantage of the explosive growth in the science of genetics and epigenetics. Our capacity to translate new knowledge in these and other important areas into meaningful advancements in clinical practice will require further investment by society at a time when economic resources are limited. We must not commit the error highlighted in the old joke about the man who set out to swim across the English Channel. After swimming two thirds of the distance, he decided he couldn’t make it and instead turned around and swam back!

All of us have many experiences and perspectives to share with each new generation of physicians. Regardless of whether we spend most of our time in the clinic, hospital, research laboratory, or classroom, we have important insights to offer. We have a shared responsibility to provide mentoring and guidance to our junior colleagues. I encourage all of you to share your wisdom and leadership with the Class of 2015 and beyond.

On a personal note, I want to thank Dr Susan Turney for the wisdom and leadership that she has shared during her many years of dedicated service to the Wisconsin Medical Society. The School of Medicine and Public Health is proud to claim her as a distinguished alumna, but in reality the entire state of Wisconsin should be proud and grateful for all she has given us over the years. We wish her the very best in her future adventures.

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