

By Ron Hartung  
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## WHITE COAT CEREMONY WELCOMES STUDENTS INTO MEDICAL PROFESSION

Watching 120 students put on coats might not sound like a memorable Friday night. But if those are new medical students slipping into physician's white coats, and if the audience is filled with the people who love them, then suddenly it's an unbeatable event. It's called the White Coat Ceremony, and the College of Medicine's Class of 2014 got to experience it Aug. 20.

"What this ceremony is all about is to recognize and acknowledge this significant transition in your professional life as you get ready to work with and care for patients in your future training," Dean John P. Fogarty said as he welcomed the first-year students into the world of medicine. "The white coat, along with the stethoscope, is one of the most recognizable symbols of medicine. You should wear it with great pride."

The ceremony was moving and meaningful but not solemn in the least. The audience laughed over a few student missteps onstage. They went "Aww" in unison when it was announced that a father or other relative was the one helping a student put on that white coat. The students cheered for the professors they got to know best this summer: anatomy instructors Lynn Romrell and Dr. Jim Cavanagh.

And they stood and applauded Dr. Robert Watson, executive associate dean for administrative affairs. While giving his speech, Watson stopped, took off his white coat, reached behind the lectern, grabbed a shorter, yellowed coat and slipped it on. It was the first white coat he had received 40 years earlier, when he started what was then called an internship (now called residency). Up on the stage, he started emptying the pockets:

"Here is what is left of my Roi-Tan cigars. All the really cool interns had one of these in his mouth. Here is what is left in my roll of Wint-O-Green mints. If you had a cigar in your mouth, then you needed to remove it and pop in a Wint-O-Green before seeing a patient...."

"Here are the slides from the last patient from whom I drew blood as an intern.... And here is my stethoscope. The rubber has deteriorated, but this stethoscope heard hundreds of hearts, thousands of lungs. What memories this coat and these pockets hold. The white coat is special."

The featured speaker was Dr. Curtis Stine, who focused on the physician's responsibility of service to others. He got a laugh when he quoted a doctor the audience wasn't expecting:

"One of the most quoted doctors of all time, Dr. Seuss, in his book 'The Lorax,' speaks of service when he says, 'Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not.'"

Then he challenged the students to keep service in mind as they envisioned their careers:

"Who will become the pediatrician in Immokalee caring for children of migrant farm workers? Who will become a general internist at the Community Health Center in Orlando, caring for adults that

fall below the poverty level? Who is going to deliver all the babies born in 2016 to single moms in Tampa? Who will become the family physician who devotes him/herself to serving a rural community in North Florida? Who will be my geriatrician as I retire, grow old and, eventually, die? To paraphrase the Talmud: 'If not you, who? If not now, when?'"

Joining the first-year students there in the Oglesby Union Ballroom were 17 fourth-year students. They were being inducted into the Gold Humanism Honor Society, nominated because they excelled at both the technical and the caring aspects of the profession, nominated by people who said these were the kinds of physicians they would want caring for their loved ones. The inductees were Rachel Bixler, Andrew Cooke, Josh Counihan, Mary Currie, Komal D'Souza, Rafael de la Puente, Justin Deen, Abby Hunter, Marlisha Jackson, Ashley Lucke, Layla Lundquist-Smith, Juline Machado, Zita Magloire, Kim Maguire, Tashara Martin, Kathleen McGlynn and Shaila Siraj.

Speaking to the younger students, D'Souza said:

"Over the next four years, you will meet hundreds of patients. You will listen to their stories, examine their bodies and eventually participate in their diagnosis and management. You will share in a mother's joy of holding her newborn child for the first time, you will comfort the family member of a father who just succumbed to cancer – you will be a central part of some of the most defining moments in relative strangers' lives.

"...Sometimes the simple act of sitting down next to a patient, touching their hand and listening to their story is as therapeutic as any medication."

At the close of the ceremony, the new medical students recited this oath: "Now entering the study of medicine, I pledge to dedicate my life to the service of humanity. I will study and practice with dignity, and will maintain the honor of the medical profession. I will treat all I encounter equally, regardless of race, religion or social standing. I will not use my knowledge contrary to the laws of humanity. These promises I make freely and upon my honor."

And now, with one summer semester behind them, they get back to work.