

The Medical Commencement Archive

Volume 6, 2019



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Susan Hingle is an Internal Medicine specialist and a Professor of Medicine, who serves as Associate Dean for Human and Organizational Potential, and Director of Faculty Development. Dr. Hingle recently graduated from the prestigious Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine (ELAM) Program. She has received several teaching awards including the Golden Apple Award, the Excellence in Teaching Outstanding Teacher Award, and the Leonard Tow Humanism in Medicine Award. She has been active nationally in numerous organizations, including the American College of Physicians (ACP). She served as Chair of the ACP Board of Regents 2017-2018 and Chair of Board of Governors 2013-2014. Dr. Hingle was honored with ACP's McDonald Award for Young Physicians. In 2011, 2012, and 2013, she was awarded the ACP John Tooker Evergreen Award for Chapter Management and Innovation. She earned a bachelor's degree from Miami University and a medical degree from Rush University Medical College. She completed an Internal Medicine residency at Georgetown University Medical Center, where she served as Chief Resident of Internal Medicine. Dr. Hingle is married and has two sons. She grew up in Decatur Illinois and is extremely proud to be part of SIU's mission.

President Degioia, Dean Mitchell, Board of Directors and students of the Class of 2019, I want to thank you for this unexpected privilege of returning to Georgetown and speaking to some of the Hoyas who are going to continue the tradition of making a difference in the world. NEVER EVER in my wildest dreams did I dream that I would be asked to give a commencement address, especially at my beloved alma mater, Georgetown. It still doesn't seem quite real. If it totally falls flat, hopefully I will wake up and find that it is not real.

When I talked with some of your class leaders, Colleen, Victoria and Stephen about what they were hoping for in a graduation address, their biggest advice was "Keep it short. No more than 3-5 points". I'll do my best.

Take home message #1: Practice gratitude.

I'm going to give you a chance to begin that practice now, in case you haven't already started doing so.

You are intelligent, smart, compassionate, kind, generous, diligent, hard-working, persistent, perseverant, innovative, creative individuals, BUT... you are also quite privileged. You would NOT be here if it were not for the support and love and care and sacrifice of your family, friends and other support systems. Just like I wouldn't be here if it weren't for the unselfish love and support of my amazing family, especially my husband, Kevin who is here with me today. In RA Palacio's book Wonder, the main character Augie says "I think there should be a rule that everyone in the world should get a standing ovation at least once in their lives." So on the off chance that any one of your family, friends, or support system who are here celebrating you, including my husband, please stand now to give them THEIR well deserved standing ovation.

You are entering a very privileged profession, but one that will challenge you. Our healthcare system is struggling. Much will be asked of you. You will have many times when you feel over-worked and under-appreciated, even questioning why you became a physician. But if you intentionally make practicing gratitude a part of your every day practice, you will recognize that it is truly a privilege, not afforded to many, to be able to care for our fellow human beings. Be intentional about prioritizing gratitude. You can do it through journaling, through discussing 3 good things with your family or friends, through using an app like Delightful, through prayer; it doesn't matter how but it does matter that you do it. Gratitude will connect you to the meaning in medicine and the ordinary miracles happening around you every single day.

Take home message #1: Practice gratitude.

Take home message #2: Embrace taking the path less traveled.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said "Do not go where the path may lead; go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." Much of your life to this point has been mapped out for you. Much of your life has likely been spent trying to fit in and comparing yourself to others. Grades will soon disappear. Sure there will be metrics that you are expected to meet, but for the most part, from here on out your measures of success will come from within. There is something liberating in that. It allows you more comfort in exploring what excites you and becoming who you were meant to be. Failures will hopefully not be viewed as failures, but they will become opportunities to learn and explore and grow. When you face a road block, simply turn and go down the other path, the path less or untraveled. It will be far more

interesting with greater opportunity. Had I not done so, I would not have had the opportunity to lead the American College of Physicians as Chair of the Board of Governors and the Board of Regents. I would not have the opportunity to create an entirely new program focusing on well-being and professional satisfaction at SIU. I would not be the mother of two amazing sons. The many challenges I have faced in my life and the many, many, many, many failures have made me who I am. Because of them I have both grit and grace. They have made me more patient, more resilient, more compassionate, more empathetic, more human, more open-minded, more relatable, more determined, and more courageous. And who I have become is a far better person than I could have ever imagined or dreamed. I want that for each and every one of you too.

Take home message #2: Embrace taking the path less traveled.

Take home message #3: Get involved in advocacy.

As Dr. Knowlan said during your white coat ceremony “The patient. The patient. The patient. Needs you more than ever now.” Our healthcare system is struggling, but you cannot simply accept that. As physicians, you have incredible power. Physicians remain one of the most respected professions in our country. As such, you have great power. I call on you to use that power to influence change. Change for your patients, change for your communities, change for your colleagues, change for your profession. Do not resign yourself to the fact that the EMRs are a burden, work to improve them. If you don’t like that some subspecialty physicians earn 3,4 or even 5 times what some primary care physicians make; work to fix the dysfunctional payment system. If you don’t, there will not be enough primary care physicians to care for our patients. Do not simply accept that women physicians and physicians from under-represented groups get paid less, do not commonly rise to high level leadership, and do not get promoted as quickly or to the highest ranks as often as male physicians; work to improve those inequities. If you don’t, women and under-represented physicians will continue to burn out at high rates and not be able to provide high quality to care to our patients. If you think gun violence is a public health crisis, engage in the work needed to change that. If it bothers you that patients who are on public assistance get poorer care and have poorer outcomes than those with premium insurance plans; work to change that. Do not accept that many of those born into poverty or with disabilities will not reach their full potential; be a part of needed changes. Use your privilege and your power and your influence. “The patient. The patient. The patient. Needs you more than ever now.”

Take home message #3: Get involved in advocacy.

Take home message #4: Cura personalis. You must take care of yourself and of each other.

Luke 12:48 says “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.” For those of you who are not Christian, Peter Parker aka Spider Man shares the same message when he says “With great power comes responsibility.” As I said previously, you are entering a noble, privileged profession that will challenge you. It is an amazing gift, but it can become all consuming. I speak from personal experience. You can easily lose what is important to you, if you don’t pay attention. It is extremely common to pay so much attention to caring for others, that you forget or simply do not make time to care for yourself. There is a perverse culture in medicine where it is like a badge of honor to be sleep deprived and to work exhausted and when we are sick. Self-care is essential. You must take care of yourself; otherwise you are no good to others. We must, together, work to change the culture so that we reward self-care. We must also change the dangerous culture of silence that exists in medicine, where we are afraid to talk to others when we are struggling. Up to 30% of residents experience depression. The rates of suicide in male doctors is up to 3 times greater than that of their non-physician peers and up to 6 times greater for women physicians. Losing someone very close to me was life altering. Unfortunately, it took this devastating loss to call me to action. We must share our struggles with each other so that we can help each other. One of the greatest gifts I have ever received was a note from some of my students who wrote “We know you don’t think you are Wonder Woman, but we do. Just like Wonder Woman, your strengths are your compassion, empathy and authenticity. You inspire us by sharing of yourself, including your vulnerability.” Once a Hoya, always a Hoya, -- don’t ever forget cura personalis.

Take home message #4: You must take care of yourself and of each other.

It is an incredible honor and privilege to be sharing this special day with you when you officially become physicians. You have incredible opportunity in front of you. Be true to yourself. Be bold in shaping your future and making a difference.

Thank you.