

The Medical Commencement Archive

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University of Central Florida College of Medicine
Commencement Address

If Not Now, Then When?

Dr. Judith Simms-Cendan is an Associate Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology and Director of International Experiences at the University Of Central Florida College Of Medicine. She is the only provider in central Florida focused on Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology; she opened the first clinics dedicated to these patients in 2010 at Winnie Palmer Hospital. Dr. Simms-Cendan has also been involved in international medical education for over 15 years. Her most recent work has expanded to include reproductive medicine education at medical schools in Ethiopia. She is also a leader of the Central Florida Interprofessional Education working group. This group designs and delivers Interprofessional workshops for medical, pharmacy, social work and nursing students. Dr. Simms-Cendan additionally helped establish the Knights Student Run Free Clinic at Grace Medical Home in 2013 and serves as a Faculty Advisor for the students. In this role she assists with faculty recruitment, research, organization, and fundraising. The clinic's innovative programs have recently been presented at national meetings and the Knights clinic board is now helping other new medical schools establish their own clinics.

Good morning graduates, family, friends, faculty and staff! What an honor and a privilege it is to speak to you today! I had the chance at match day to ask some of the graduates what they would like to hear from me, and they said they wanted to know, “*How do [I] do it?*” While my two shots of espresso each morning go a long way to help the cause, that in and of itself is not a sufficient answer to what motivates me to get involved in so many service and learning activities, especially those driven by and for students. My innately high energy level, which my wonderfully supportive husband has tolerated for almost 30 years, does not fully explain my willingness to overbook clinics, or teach in Ethiopia.

Hillel the Elder who lived 2000 years ago, was known for simplifying complex philosophy and beliefs. I learned his famous saying when I was in junior high school and it is the basis of my personal ethic: “*If I am not for myself, who is for me? And being for my own self, what am I? And if not now, when?*”

“The joy in knowledge is the sharing, whether in patient care, research or education..”

“If I am not for myself, who is for me?” may sound selfish, but I have always taken it to mean I must take ownership of my responsibilities for my education, for my health, for my actions. If you are passionate about something, don’t wait for someone to hand-deliver the opportunity to you. Go for it. As residents, seek the interesting cases. Read and learn about the unique diseases in your specialty. Above all, engage. This does not mean you have to be an extrovert. But you have not chosen a passive profession, so you need to question your patients and your col-

leagues, not just Dr. Google, to get to the answers. That’s what makes medicine fun. Engaging, especially as it applies to a patient’s history, is a gift for me because it helps me understand the person and how best to help them. And it is just good medicine; to quote Osler: “*It is much more important to know what sort of a patient has a disease, than what sort of disease a patient has.*”

The second part of the Hillel quote is: “*and being for my own self, what am I?*” As physicians we are teachers. Now that we have learned so much, how useless is that knowledge if we keep it to ourselves? The joy in knowledge is the sharing, whether in patient care, research or education. What an amazing privilege we have in achieving the MD degree. This privilege carries a heavy responsibility. Yes, it means long hours and incredible angst when a patient does poorly under our care. But the fulfillment from caring for others, especially those with few resources and support, is magic. Embrace and celebrate that gift.



Finally: *“if not now, when?”* Anyone who knows me knows I talk too fast, I walk too fast, and much to my children’s chagrin, I talk about pediatric gynecology anytime and anywhere. Patience is not one of my most abundant attributes. But when you combine impatience and efficiency, you can accomplish big things on behalf of others. Do not put off for the future what you can do in the present: add the patient who calls late in the afternoon, finish your notes, then volunteer at the free clinic, or be an advocate for the underserved.

One of my mentors taught me that *“every day is a school day”* and many of you have heard me say that. When you take the opportunity to learn medicine well, you are for yourself. When you engage with others, you are for much more than yourself. And when you take the opportunities to act now, and not wait, you will capture the same excitement, energy and enthusiasm you have today.

UCF has prepared you well for the next steps in your journey. You have, as we like to say, a head and a heart for medicine. Use both. Care for others. Meet unmet needs. Don’t wait, hesitate or be fearful. There is too much to do. Look around and you’ll see people who need your help. All you have to do is engage.

“Above all, engage.”