

Crossroads

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It is an honor to be here today. I begin by thanking the faculty. They are here because of their devotion to you (our students), to this institution and the practice of medicine, and to the service of our profession. Thank you for everything you do. I would also like to thank the families of our graduates. The support they have provided is immeasurable. I am sure that we would not be here today at this event if it were not for you as well. Ultimately, the future of this institution and this profession is dependent on our ability to perpetuate our heritage. All of you make that work possible.

I heard once that the ideal commencement address is 11 minutes in length – long enough for the audience to feel that they got their money's worth but short enough that they didn't have to pay attention. Well, let's compromise and make it short enough that you will feel that it's worthy of your attention.

I chose the theme "Crossroads" for a reason. Clearly, today is a kind of end to one episode in your lives and the beginning of yet another. Just as your careers are at a clear starting point, our profession is at the brink of a new beginning – a transformation,

really. I am certain that during your careers, the convergence of computer science, genetics, and medicine, will create a world that is difficult for us to imagine. During this time of great change, your own capabilities, especially your emotional health and stability, will become ever more important. This is my real message to you today. Crossroads is really a metaphor for "choice." You will have innumerable choices. And these seemingly small choices will make big differences. In a world in which so much will seem to be beyond your control, it should be a comfort for you to know with certainty, that the most important thing in life – your control of the most important decisions – will always be yours; will always be under your control. At times it will be difficult, if not impossible, to know ultimately which decisions are the important ones; for we all realize that some seemingly small choices will make big differences.

DECISIONS

Your first and most important choice is attitude. It is indeed true, most people are about as happy as they decide to be. How do you want to feel? You choose. You can choose to be happy or you can choose to let both events and other people determine how you feel. This is one of the most important choices you will make. Happiness sets the stage for optimism, kindness, generosity, forgiveness, patience, humility, and gratitude – all the attributes you will need in abundance to fulfill your potential as a physician and as a member of your family and the community. In the end, we all want to be cared for, especially when we are vulnerable, especially when we are patients. You will need a deep emotional reservoir, because your duty is to reach your patients emotionally. It's an integral part of the higher purpose of medicine, and in the age of technology, it is the part of medicine in greatest jeopardy. Someone once said, that the world is divided into givers and takers. It is your role to give, to give care. Of course, to do that, you must have enough within yourself, in order to have enough to give to others. It is up to you to renew that reservoir and the first step is to choose. Choose to be positive.

The second choice, after you've chosen your attitude, is what do you do in this uncertain world armed now, as you should be, with this foundation of emotional strength and stability? Based on my experiences ranging from that of a solo practice physician in a small rural town, to my current position here at Ochsner, I have a few suggestions. I am sure there are many more, but there are some that I feel are important.

- 1. Always invest in yourself.** No one can take that away from you. The more capable you are, the greater are your possibilities; and, remember that luck favors the prepared. Preparation builds confidence, which in turn builds optimism and refills the reservoir of emotional strength that you will need.
- 2. Surround yourself with positive people.** We tend to absorb the attitudes of those around us. Yes, your mother was right. You pick your friends, don't let them pick you. Attitudes are contagious.
- 3. Be there when you are needed.** There is a saying that 90% of life is just showing up. In medicine, 90% just isn't good enough. You need to be there when you're needed and where you're needed – all the time. Habits make choice more automatic; they make it easier. Develop the habit of always being there and you won't regret it. You'll be amazed at the number of problems you prevent, the problems you solve, and the growth you enjoy.
- 4. Cultivate a deep sense of gratitude.** Be grateful for the great things and especially be grateful for the small ones. If you need a refresher, spend some time with your patients in the intensive care units. We can all learn from those experiences if we are willing to listen, and to watch, and to remember.
- 5. Cultivate a sense of humility.** This is the best protection against arrogance as arrogance is a very common cause of failure for the gifted, such as yourselves. I make very few promises – but I'll make one here today. I promise you that you will make mistakes. The real test is what you do with this knowledge. Will you first proceed with the knowledge that at any time you could be wrong and will therefore be humbly vigilant? And when you discover your mistake, the ultimate test will be what you do about it. Do the right thing. That's a true test of character.
- 6. On a personal note, always spend less than you make.** Many of life's pressures are self-imposed. You will have a great deal of pressure in medicine. Don't add to these pressures needlessly.
- 7. Avoid cynicism like the Plague.** If it happens to you, change. Change your attitude, change your environment, change your friends – whatever it takes. It will poison you and those around you. One safeguard is to believe and act like you are part of something greater than yourself. Certainly, the practice of medicine is a great example. By giving, you will always receive more than you gave.

8. Define your principles. Remember that principles are of greatest value precisely when they are most inconvenient. For example, the principles I have mentioned are, at times, easy to say but hard to do – and when they are hard, they are most important. What are your principles?

9. Believe that the little things matter. You can change the world. You have enormous influence on those around you. You have transformational power. Use it. Use it wisely. Each and every day, each and every individual thought, and each and every individual encounter, will involve a choice by you. You become what you think; you are what you do. Because of your capabilities, because of your position, because of your power, the consequences are magnified. Your influence affects others in ways that make them different, for better or worse, because of their exposure to you. A recent book called *The Tipping Point* explores that concept. I recommend that to you. A lifetime of good will and good deeds has a huge impact, which we can only dimly understand, but believe with all of your heart and mind that this is true – because it is true.

A graduation gift is in the back row. It's a small book titled *Emotional Intelligence* by Daniel Goleman. There are many kinds of "smarts" – this book addresses a kind of smarts that could be the greatest determinant of your success. I recommend it highly. It's one of the tools which will be used in this organization to make us better and this a better place. In the end, it is little more than common sense – but we all know common sense is at times very uncommon. I hope that you will find it a useful tool in your personal journey through life. If you follow its directives, your life will be a better one and those around you will be better as well.

Finally, we are proud to have been part of your life. We hope we have contributed to your future success. We hope that you know that you will always be part of Ochsner.

Thank you. 🌸

The Ochsner Journal Salutes the 2002 Graduates of the Ochsner Graduate Medical Education Program

Hamid Afshar-Kharaghan
Internal Medicine
Cardiology Fellow -
OCHSNER

Kirk Bonner
Internal Medicine/Family Practice
HCA - Columbia, New Orleans, LA

Janet Burroff
Medical Oncology
EJMC, Metairie, LA

Roberto Carcamo
Internal Medicine
unavailable at this time

Christopher Cicci
Thoracic Cardiovascular Surgery
GP - NE Cardiovascular, NC

George Corbett
Orthopaedic Surgery
Sports Medicine Fellow, OH

Elena Cucurull
Internal Medicine/ Rheumatology
Fellow - LSU

Sammi Dali
Cardiology
Interventional Cardiology
Hartford Hospital, CT

Shawn Davis
Internal Medicine
unavailable at this time

Marc Dean
Obstetrics & Gynecology
PP - Florence, AL

Timothy Dozier
MRI
GP - Central LA Imaging, LA

Kathryn Elmore
Internal Medicine
Chief Medical Resident - OCHSNER

Jose Fumero
Radiology, Diagnostic
Neuroradiology Fellow, LSU

Dawn Galliano
Anesthesiology
PP - LSU, New Orleans

Dante Galliano
Anesthesiology
GP - Parish Anesthesia, LA

Bret Garretson
Gastroenterology
GP - Gastroenterology Associates,
Covington, LA

Anthony Gauthier Jr
Urology
GP - Borgess Medical Hospital, MI

Talal Hamdan
Internal Medicine
OCHSNER

Monique Hamilton
Obstetrics & Gynecology
PP - New Orleans, LA

Eric Heinberg
Obstetrics & Gynecology
GP - Providence Community Health, RI

Rebecca Hysong
General Surgery
HMO - Florida Health Care Plans, FL

Saliha Ishaq
Rheumatology
unavailable at this time

Farrell Johnson
Family Practice
unavailable at this time

Briton Jordan
General Surgery
Colon & Rectal Fellow
University of Illinois - Chicago

Thomachan Kalapura
Cardiology Academics:
OK University Health Sciences Center

Angela Kozak
Retina
GP - Valley Retina, TX

Eric Lopez Del Valle
Radiology, Diagnostic
Neurointerventional Radiology Fellow, PA

Renu Mahajan
Internal Medicine
HMO - IHC, St George, UT

J. Scott Manton
Gastroenterology
PP - Digestive Disease Associates, TN

Erica Martin
Anesthesiology
unavailable at this time

Kenneth Matejka
MRI
MRI Fellow - OCHSNER

Michelle McCain
Rheumatology
PP - Thibodaux, LA

Karen Mitchell
Colon & Rectal Surgery
GP-Texas CRS, LLP, TX

Malika Morse
Nephrology
Nephrology Fellow, LSU

Thai Nguyen
Internal Medicine
Chief Medical Resident - OCHSNER

Wyn (Nguyen) Nguyen
Colon & Rectal Surgery
PP - North Texas Colon &
Rectal Surgery, TX

Robert Parel
General Surgery
PP - University Surgical Associates, GA

Smita Patel
Family Practice
Hospital-Based Medicine - OCHSNER

Nathan Patterson
General Surgery
Plastic Surgery Resident,
San Diego, CA

Patricia Porada
Internal Medicine
OCHSNER

Ananth Prasad
Cardiology
PP - San Antonio, TX

Hugo Quintana
Cardiology
Interventional Cardiology Fellow -
OCHSNER

Shannon Roberts
Obstetrics & Gynecology
PP - Jackson Hole,
Obstetrics/Gynecology, WY

Aditya Samal
Cardiology
GP - Houston, TX

Jonathan Shults
Orthopaedic Surgery
PP - South Carolina Orthopedics
Institute, SC

Rajesh Subramanian
Cardiology
Interventional Cardiology Fellow -
OCHSNER

Stephania Timothy
General Surgery
Military - Colorado Springs, CO

Tuan-Huy Tran
Endocrinology & Metabolism
Endocrinology Fellow - OCHSNER

Richard Vanlangendonck, Jr.
Urology
Laparoscopy & Minimal Invasive
Surgery Fellow, MO

Jose Wiley
Interventional Cardiology
South Dakota

Melissa Wynn
Infectious Diseases
PP - Jesse Penico, LA

John York
Vascular Surgery
GP - CVT of Greensboro, NC

Legend: GP: Group Practice
PP: Private Practice