

CHANCELLOR COLLINS COMMENCEMENT REMARKS
48th COMMENCEMENT
JUNE 6, 2021

Nursing, science and medicine at its best; that is what our graduates represent. We join today to celebrate their many accomplishments.

It is a privilege, for the fourteenth time, to welcome the family, friends and graduates of the three schools of our institution to a commencement celebration. A ceremony with some parts solemn and all parts joyous, today, we gather and peer into the future of the health professions.

It was not that long ago, although to some it may seem like forever, that you came to Worcester to embark upon the next leg of your professional journey. Nervous anticipation accompanied the confidence that your accomplishments merited. While there was great hope in your expectations of what the future would behold, in full honesty, few could have predicted what was yet to unfold.

Oh, there were tests and practicums; there were clinical rotations and complex scientific experiments; and there were community and global experiences. There were long days and longer nights; there was personal growth and professional challenge; and there were moments to forget but more memories that will stay with you over the course of your lives.

Today, all of you are bound by an unmistakable realization that you have been changed by your time at this medical school and by once unimaginable challenges.

Throughout our time together, we have been guided by a mission to change the course of history of disease; this past year, a disease has changed the course of history and your academic journeys.

On your first days, I encouraged you to hold the hands of your patients and colleagues with esteem. One year ago, we isolated to protect ourselves and others. We covered our smiles with masks; our hearts with gowns; and our hands with gloves.

By staying apart all at our institution stood together. By staying together, we stood apart.

Through simple acts of kindness, you exemplified what is best about the healing professions. You cared for those most in need. You delivered food to those who were hungry. You served on wards, in tents, in arenas, in conference centers and at your neighbors' doors to assure that the tenets of our professions would shine forth.

You made hand sanitizer when none could be purchased; you searched for masks when none could be found; you created apps that became essential public health tools. You volunteered to administer vaccines to those most in need of science's protection and human connection. You cared when caring seemed absent!

In moments when science, nursing and medical care were needed most, you came together to participate in the discoveries that brought forth new treatments, new therapeutics and new vaccines. In moments that created stories that will make your families proud, your selfless acts dispelled selfishness and displayed self-sacrifice.

Brighter dawns now signal a new season that is upon us. As we emerge into it, carry forth into your careers the hard-earned wisdom of recent days. Revel and appreciate the pace and wonder of science that before our eyes improves and brings hope to the human condition.

Never forget that ours is a global world and recognize that success against a virus at home should be of little solace when that same virus ravishes our neighbors from different lands. With an emboldened wisdom, let us promote the human dignity of every citizen of the world, for that is our true calling.

In this moment, let us literally and figuratively close any distance between us. Let us reinforce the essential elements of compassionate and humanistic medicine. Have confidence that your toil – in the lab, on the ward and at your patient’s bedside – can change the course of history of disease for each person, whatever their condition and wherever they may be.

In your bright future, you will recount to your children and grandchildren your memories of this time. When you do, with humility recall the grief, the heavy burden, the ways in which every hour of our days was changed. Also recall how in every hour of every day, good people came together in spirit and support of one another. Recall how you saw nurses and physicians rise to the challenges before them. Recall how scientists used their intellect and ingenuity to confront a microscopic foe.

Together. Learning. Caring. Innovating. Collaborating. Sacrificing. Discovering. Nurses, scientists and doctors all improving with each passing day to offer all that they could to a world in need.

Throughout your careers, never let the mask, gown or gloves come between you and those for whom it will be your privilege to care.

There will be moments when all therapeutic options for your patients have been exhausted; in those moments, please remember that the greatest privilege of your career may be the time you will spend holding the hand of your patient. These will be moments that comfort those for whom you care and sustain you in your chosen profession.

Please know of the privilege it has been for all who have been the stewards of your education to see you grow and prosper as our future colleagues. Each of us has taken an oath to educate those who shall come behind us in our professions. This is a sacred obligation to which now we welcome you to join us in fulfilling.

Remember, always seek comfort and connection in the hands of your family and friends, for they will sustain you throughout your years of service.

Always extend your hand to a colleague, for ours are caring professions.

Most importantly, always hold the hand of your patients with esteem.

The experiences you will encounter and the decisions that you will make in the days and years ahead shall be with you for a lifetime. During the trying and triumphant moments of your career, please know of the enduring pride that the University of Massachusetts Medical School shall have in calling you one of your own.

You are scientists, nurses and doctors at their best.

Congratulations and Godspeed along your professional journey!