

**UMass Medical School Chancellor Michael F. Collins**  
**Commencement Address**  
**June 5, 2016**

It is a special privilege each commencement day to have the opportunity to offer a few final thoughts to our graduates and the community of family and friends that has gathered to support them.

Our faculty and students continue to demonstrate their keen intellect, compassion and innovation skills as they receive numerous accolades for their scholarly contributions.

Could I ask the members of our faculty who are present today, to rise and be recognized?

During this past year, throughout the Commonwealth and beyond, our university has been making the case that we are “here for a reason!” As we look to the future, we are emboldened by our campus’ many pathways to promise.

At MassBiologics, we have expanded our presence in the Commonwealth by increasing our footprint onto the South Coast region of our state, as we continue development of novel and life-changing biologics.

At Commonwealth Medicine, we continue to advocate for those most in need in our Commonwealth and beyond, as we provide the intellectual capital to assist those who care for the neediest amongst us.

We take great pride in celebrating our 20-year commitment to the Worcester Pipeline Collaborative, a collaboration with the Worcester public schools that has transformed the light of hope into expectation for students in Worcester’s North Quadrant.

Through a strategic partnership with Baystate Health in Springfield, we are in the midst of establishing the medical school’s first regional campus, as together with UMass Amherst we create a new educational pathway for medical students who wish to pursue a track in population-based urban and rural community health.

We recognize the importance of our efforts to continue to spark discovery and create innovation throughout the life sciences ecosystem that exists in our Commonwealth.

Our founders could only have imagined what we have become. Less than half a century ago, on this very spot, the land was tilled, cattle grazed and visionaries in medicine stood aside the lake as they planned to create a health sciences university that would transform Worcester and change the future of medicine.

Today, here assembled are those who are fulfilling that vision. Clearly, we are here for a reason!

We are known throughout the land for our commitment to primary care.

The care provided by our health system and educational affiliates is at the forefront of medicine! Those who are our patients are most grateful that our clinicians care, discover and teach.

The research conducted throughout our laboratories generates new, exciting and innovative pathways of promise that are at the leading edge of science and innovation. We know because members of our faculty, this year, have received acclaim throughout our land and beyond as, collectively, they have garnered almost \$270 million in research awards and contracts from the NIH, industry innovators and foundations, all of whom recognize the import and impact of the science on this campus.

That said, there is no greater promise than that which exists in the lives of our graduates this day.

As the current stewards of this great public medical school, we welcomed you to our campus as you were and we have seen you transformed into the professionals you have become.

With great anticipation we know that you shall fulfill the vision of our founders; but will do so in places and ways they could have only imagined.

In each and every encounter throughout your careers, you shall represent all that is great about this very special place. Through your actions, you shall realize your full promise, and make us greater still!

During this past year, throughout our Commonwealth, we have faced the gripping reality of the opioid epidemic, an indiscriminate public health crisis that defiles our midst. Thousands have died from preventable illness. Yet, there is no mosquito vector to grab our attention; no blood borne illness to marshal public health forces in response.

Opioids are a quiet killer, surrounded by despair on one side and loneliness on the other.

Through the leadership of our governor, focus has been galvanized to this challenge and our campus has responded with intensity and determination.

As the state's public medical school, we have a special responsibility to act and we have accepted the governor's challenge.

You are the first classes to have experienced content-focused education and training directly as a result of this initiative. We have worked diligently with our colleagues throughout medicine in Massachusetts and developed new opioid-conscious curricula and training modules.

We are so pleased that our faculty and graduates have embraced these educational imperatives with the urgency necessitated by the extent of this epidemic.

In the days just following my graduation from medical school, we were compelled to learn about HIV infection. A few years ago, the world's attention and energy focused on Ebola.

In the past few months, Zika has gained international awareness spurring action by the CDC and world health authorities.

In each case, we know that the emergence of such diseases necessitates a lifelong commitment to learning. We are encouraged that you embrace that reality and will model it throughout your careers.

As your new professional journeys bring you along many pathways into the future, you should embrace the possibilities that await with great confidence. You are graduates in professions that are respected and needed to change our world. It is clear to all that you are here for a reason.

Please continue to be guided by the idealism that you brought with you to campus.

Rebuff indifference wherever you see it and whenever you encounter it. Apply your enormous intellect and special gifts to the most audacious causes like changing the course of the history of disease.

As you do so, please remember that your simple acts of kindness may become profound moments and images that will last forever.

Put your arms around a mentee in a lab; encourage them to continue on, as that next experiment may yield the results they need to unravel an unknown.

Sit on the side of the bed; dismiss the entourage that accompanies you and take a moment to hold the hand of your patient as you comfort them in their moments of greatest need.

Reach out to those less fortunate, those in your communities and those far beyond. They are in need of your intellect and compassion. So few of us are given the privilege that soon will be accorded to you; use your many talents to care for and about others throughout the rest of your lives.

As you begin your careers, and as you continue in them, we hope that you will be inspired by those we pay tribute to today. They are here for a reason!

Like Claire Pomeroy, will you be able to overcome hardship and adversity, pursue clinical care, education and research and emerge as a physician-scientist with a determination that inspires and, while so doing, model leadership that transforms the art and science of medicine while bolstering support for the hope promised by biomedical research?

Like Dermot Desmond, will you be able to use your gifts to leverage respect for others and do so with ingenuity and a spirit of determination to innovate and motivate and while so doing, positively impact the lives of many through a commitment to selfless service of those most in need?

Like Charles Baker, will you be able to commit to public service, and through that service, mobilize the talents of others to serve a greater need and do so with a seriousness of purpose that makes aspirations expectations?

As you embark upon your bright pathways of promise, we shall watch with heightened anticipation for your many accomplishments. Please remain mindful that our communities, our Commonwealth, our nation and our world need you.

We need your intellect and innovation;

We need your care and compassion;

We need your humility, humanity and kindness.

And, all the while, know that we will take great pride in recognizing you as one of our own.

You are here for a reason!

Congratulations!