

Chancellor Michael F. Collins
UMass Medical School Commencement Address
June 2, 2019

It is with a sense of great joy that I stand before you this day as you embark on the next steps of the journey in your respective professions.

It has been a dedicated accomplishment along a marvelous and ambitious path that brought you to this moment.

None of you has made the journey alone: you have been accompanied by those who care for and about you the most; you have been guided by colleagues and mentors; you have been stewarded by a most dedicated faculty. Would you join me in recognizing your faculty this day?

It is indeed special, in a society where some might exalt the “self,” that you have chosen to dedicate your lives to others. This brings me great joy.

Now, all of us should be mindful that you shall derive the means to your livelihood by the elucidation of science and the provision of care to those in need. Yes, in this way you will support yourself. But, within the high calling and tenets of our professions, please always place the needs of others before your own. This will bring you lasting joy.

Let me encourage you to commit yourselves to each “little good” (which may not be so little) that you can proffer over the course of your careers. You will find that these little goods give you the greatest joy.

From the perch of the lab bench, the podium of a lecture hall or the collaboration space at your company, through science, you will have the opportunity to guide and impact the careers of others. Your colleagues and co-workers will desire and need your consistent support and encouragement. When an experiment requires additional effort, or a result proves disappointing, these will be the times that some little good can come from you.

Whether a quiet reassurance, a gentle nudge or a firm assist, the little good you give will go a long way toward inspiring a continued commitment and devotion to the pursuit of pristine science.

On the wards, in exam rooms and at the clinics, you will be given the special privilege to assist others in your profession or help to train those who wish to follow in your footsteps. Today’s practice environment has become increasingly challenging for health care professionals. Our colleagues have the privilege and the burden of doing all that they can to alleviate their patients’ illnesses and to get them back on the path to wellness. Over time, these realities can result in uncertainty and disenchantment. Joy can become more elusive; confidence can fade away.

But, through the little good of a discrete show of support or some words of wisdom, you can help a colleague reclaim their sense of purpose and the joy that is derived from serving others.

There is no greater challenge nor nobler deed than to commit one’s self to protecting and promoting the health and dignity of each patient. If it is a little child for whom you care, you can offer the “little good”

of a bedtime story or your simple presence at dinner time, so the child is not forced to eat alone. When you are with someone who is very ill, you can offer the little good of an encouraging word, a meaningful moment of engagement, or a hand to hold that reinforces that you are, without reservation, there for the person for the duration.

And if the plaintive cry is to “Please come and see me and hold my hand,” I hope that you will take the time to offer the little good of a tender touch. Always remember, there may come a moment when you will have done all that you can do to ameliorate the medical condition; still, you can always bring and find joy in the privilege of holding another’s hand.

Your careers will be shaped, if not transformed, by artificial intelligence. The computer will record and capture more and more data points; it will manage, collate and organize enormous volumes of information; and it will assist with informing best practices. But it is only the heart and mind of a caregiver – a caregiver! – who can truly sense when a patient needs the little good of a little something more.

I have such joy on this day because it is you who are following in our footsteps. I am encouraged by your idealism, your commitment and your tenacity. Be assured that those of us who have had the privilege to oversee your educational accomplishments to date shall continue to be available to support you.

My joy emanates from knowing that you will embrace your professional obligations with the unbridled enthusiasm that first brought you to our campus. You have demonstrated time and time again that the community surrounding us matters deeply to you.

Remember the little goods of nutritious meals or clean clothes for school children in need. Remember the little goods of free care in clinics where you volunteer, as well as service on the fields where children play and to the charities that stir your hearts. Remember that your talents can impact science and care around the globe and that at times, this might require the “little good” of service in languages and cultures that are not your own.

Lastly, I wish you the joy of caring for those who cannot afford that care but for whom you shall greatly care. While some might claim that care for the poor is of little good, I can assure you that committing to those in need shall always be for a greater good.

Like Sue Mailman, may you experience the joy of the little good of serving your community and while so doing, impact the lives of children and schools where you live and work.

Like Richard Kennedy, may you experience the joy of the little good of investing time and resources to others and, while so doing, assure that science and medicine have the wherewithal to change the course of the history of disease.

Like Darrell Kirch, may you experience the joy of the little good of stewarding your profession and while so doing, assure that our educational, research and patient care efforts reflect and reinforce our high ideals and noble principles.

With the joy of a grateful institution, remember always, that we shall take great pride in recognizing you as one of our own.

And please know of the joy and privilege it was for me to be with you as you began your journey along the path of professional accomplishment.

If possible, reserve one more little good for me. And if and when the need be, please come and see me and hold my hand.

Congratulations!