

REMARKS FROM DEAN MARK RICHARDSON
2009 OHSU School of Medicine Hooding Ceremony

Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall

June 4, 2008

Good morning to you – School of Medicine Class of 2009.

Congratulations! What a wonderful day!

To our guests – family, friends and colleagues – welcome. I am pleased to see so many people here today.

Today, we honor the exceptional achievements of our newest graduates.

You complete a long and proud tradition dating back 122 years to 1887 when the School of Medicine was first established.

You join a community of men and women who dedicate their lives to contributing to health and healing everywhere. Welcome.

You have worked hard and you are well prepared to succeed.

But every generation has certain challenges to overcome.

For me, it was the protests of the 1960s and 1970s as our generation struggled to move beyond a historical legacy in which women and minorities faced terrible discrimination. We also struggled with the painful divide caused by the Vietnam War.

Dealing with these challenges changed our nation and those passions and stresses transformed us as individuals too.

The challenges of your generation will be no less transformational.

You face an economic crisis of unprecedented proportions which has exposed deep flaws in our financial systems.

And specific to your education and profession, your generation will face the daunting challenge of fixing our dysfunctional health care system.

A report from the Institute of Medicine described it well – between the health care we now have and the health care we could have lies not just a gap, but a chasm.

As providers, scientists and health care professionals, much of your career will by necessity focus on working together to build a bridge across that chasm, to change the way health care is delivered and to ensure that all patients receive health care based on the best scientific knowledge available.

Working together, you will transform our health care system. It won't be easy, but you will succeed because you are an exceptional group.

I know this because of what I observe day in and day out at the OHSU School of Medicine.

I want to share one of those observations with you.

Last month, I was privileged to witness a free community health screening in O'Bryant Park in downtown Portland.

It's not a park in the expected sense – no green spaces or flowers – it's a small postage-stamp of concrete and brick in the shadow of a sea of office buildings, a spot where homeless people often congregate, where locals know when to show up for free food and clothes.

The health event was held in the underground parking lot and when I entered, I was amazed. The dingy space had been transformed from a shadowy concrete box into a vibrant community clinic bursting with activity, a vision I still can see clearly.

Some 30 tables, rows of chairs, hundreds of volunteers and an equal number of other people milling about: different languages, all walks of life, unified by a desire to change how the health care system works, to bridge that chasm, even if just for one day.

There were parents with toddlers needing eye checkups, newly unemployed people who had lost their insurance, homeless and low-income people receiving dental care, haircuts, foot care or free medications.

That clinic was organized by OHSU students, by some of you in this room today, and by faculty members to mark the national Cover the Uninsured Week. Many other groups from around the city also participated.

In this transformed parking lot, I was struck by the easy cooperation between the students and volunteers delivering those services, the gratitude of the patients receiving them, and the vast capability to do

so much more for these patients because of the research performed in academic health centers around the country.

No single individual in that group was responsible for the success of that event and for the tremendous positive impact they had that day on health care in downtown Portland.

But every single individual had a role to play, everyone was working together. That's a great accomplishment.

This is just one example of the many collaborative events you participate in or organize.

Working together; it sounds simple, but it is not, it is hard and takes effort from every one of us.

That same spirit of collaboration will fix what is broken in our health care system. If we can put aside our vested interests and work together there are no limits to what we can accomplish.

Collaboration and teamwork are the foundation of the future.

Look around you now. These are the men and women you will be working with: researchers, policy makers, health care providers of all types, together you will change the health care world, and create better lives for everyone.

The future of health care needs great things from you.

I am absolutely confident that you are up to the challenge and look forward to a vibrant health care future with all of you as part of it.

Congratulations Class of 2009.