

REMARKS FROM SHARL AZAR, MD  
OHSU School of Medicine White Coat Ceremony  
OHSU Auditorium  
August 20, 2010

***“How to Pack for Medical School: Reflections on the White Coat by a New Physician.”***

*Go and do good.* That was the charge given to my class as we sat where you now sit only four years ago. Like many of you today, I was excited. I was relieved. I was absolutely terrified. And I was blinded by the whiteness of my white coat. Among all of those emotions, there was that hanging simple charge: *Go and do good.*

I will not be the first to tell you that the white coats you now hold will never look this white again. The sharply pressed creases will quickly disappear and it will begin to sag and droop as you quickly begin to fill it with stuff. You'll realize very quickly that everyone you meet in medical school will have a handy tool to give you in “convenient white coat size.” Your pockets will be overflowing with everything from books to laminated cards and medical supplies, to the tissue culture from the patient in room 2 and your half eaten sandwich from yesterday's lunch. But amidst the race to turn your white coats into a traveling Turkish bazaar, there are some very important things that you need to leave room for. Some things you need to fill your white coat with now. Others you will pick up along the way. I began my collection right here, right where you are now sitting where I filled my coat with the hopes and the boundless pride of the people who put me here. Wrap yourselves in their support today because you will need it more than I can make you believe right now.

I filled my coat with the stories of the people I was meeting for the first time four years ago: the people I was meeting over the anatomy table and in the lecture hall and who grew to accompany me to the wards and the OR, who I celebrated with and who uniquely understood when it didn't seem like there was much to celebrate, who I watched walk down the aisle, and



who I watched walk into a world they aimed to improve as a doctor, and who I miss incredibly only three months after we've parted. Look around you today and do not be intimidated by the stories around you but be anxious to be a part of them. Sitting with you now are your greatest allies in this uphill battle and when four years have suddenly vanished with you wondering where they went, they will be the colleagues who will first tell you that you have *done good*.

I filled my coat with the quiet moments of a woman's reflections at the end of her short life as she spoke to me about seeing her eldest daughter get married in only two months' time. And as she and I realized that our daily conversations were growing shorter as the voice of the leukemia grew ever louder, we recognized that we could still come out ahead if we sat in peaceful silence. Until the morning when I broke that silence amidst my own frustrations with how her course had turned and asked her among the mechanical hum of the ICU how she was feeling about not being able to see her daughter's wedding and she looked at me and said, "I'll be there. Just not physically." And I realizing all too outwardly how selfish my question must have seemed was abruptly cut off by one of her last reflections, "Don't worry. You've *done good* by me."

Fill your coats with those quiet moments that will be difficult to find among the clamor of medical school but will be waiting for you if you learn to listen. Fill your coats with resolve as you take the hands of a stranger and say to them, "Let me help you." Fill them with humility as a stranger takes your hands after months of treatment and says to you, "Enough." Fill them with elements that made you the healer you hoped to be when you first filled out your applications and leave room to fill them with the elements of the healer you will be shaped into by what you are about to experience. Fill them with the understanding that you will not always get what you want in these four years but you will get what you need. Fill them with the confidence that the teachers who surround you want to see you become an incredible physician. Fill them with the simple reminder of why you are here right now before they begin to feel like yokes around your neck and weights upon your shoulders at 2 o'clock in the morning on a 30-hour shift. Fill them with the clear message that I had all too often lost track of during the most difficult times and that I can confidently pass on to you now even as a physician who can measure his career in minutes: This is all worth it.



**School of Medicine**  
Oregon Health & Science University

When I sat where you now sit only four years ago, I was charged with a powerful directive that I nearly lost among the emotions of those first few moments of medical school: *Go and do good*. Today, because I know you are capable, I ask all of you, for the sake of those of us who came before you, for the sake of the teachers who are already excited to help shape your new career, for the sake of the family and lifelong friends who are sitting in this audience already recognizing that you've made it, and for the sake of the sick and the suffering whose incredible stories will shape you and remind you why you are here, I implore you as you put on your white coats and prepare to fill them: *Go and Do Better*.



**School of Medicine**  
*Oregon Health & Science University*