

**Say “Thank You”**  
**Stethoscope Ceremony**  
**20 August 2013**  
**David McKnight**

Welcome to our fourth U of T Stethoscope Ceremony. This whole week is designed to welcome you to the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto. Today, we want to welcome the new students to the PROFESSION of Medicine

First, I have some questions for the new students. Who has ever seen an episode of *House*? *Grey’s Anatomy*? *Scrubs*?

I have sad news: this is real life and this is a real medical school. It’s not *House* — brilliance (not that he is brilliant) does not excuse any behaviour. It’s not *Grey’s* — boundaries exist, and sex is not the primary motivator. It’s not *Scrubs* — it will not be a farce (although there will be joyful as well as sad times.)

This is a real medical school. There are expectations. When you get to clinical rotations you will find that the term “Meets Expectations,” has a very important meaning. And, as well as knowledge expectations, there will be Professional expectations.

Three years ago, at the first of these ceremonies, I talked about two words at the core of professionalism, **TRUST** and **RESPECT**. **TRUST**: the importance of being worthy of the trust that your patients and colleagues, and even society will place in you as a physician. **RESPECT**: the importance that you show respect — respect for patients, respect for the team you work with, respect for yourself.

The next year, the theme was “**IT’S NOT ABOUT YOU.**” Medicine is always about somebody else: usually the patient, sometimes their family, sometimes a whole community, but not about us, not about the doctors.

Last year, it was an essential truth it is easy to forget: **DOCTORS DON’T STOP BEING PEOPLE.** Doctors are human, not machines, they have needs, make mistakes, must take care of themselves.

This year, the message is very simple: **SAY “THANK YOU.”**

We welcome you this week to a real medical school. Very soon, you will start learning a huge amount about health and disease. You will learn anatomy and physiology; you will learn about diseases — but you will care for people.

I use the word “care” intentionally and this is not a new idea. The saying “Cure sometimes, treat often, comfort always” is attributed to Hippocrates, about 2400 years ago. In 1927, Francis Peabody told the medical students at Harvard, “... the secret of the care of the patient is in caring for the patient.” You will take care of patients, you will care about patients. In your years as a student of medicine — and that should extend until you retire — you will do much for the people who become your patients

But as much as you will do for patients, patients will do much for you.

In the early years, they will offer you themselves and their problems and allow you to learn from them. Say “thank you.”

Later, in your practice, with your patients you will gain experience and build expertise. Say “thank you.”

Throughout your whole working life, patients will allow you to carry out an endlessly fascinating and rewarding career. Say “thank you.”

Patients will give to you constantly. They will give you their private selves, their bodies, their fears, their hopes. They will give you their faith and their trust. Say “thank you.”

### **STETHOSCOPE CEREMONY**

So now we come to the stethoscope ceremony. As you know, some medical schools have a white coat ceremony for new students but there are some of us here who are uncomfortable with the white coat as a symbol of the profession. We fear that it emphasizes differences between the doctor and the patient. It can set doctors, and medical students, apart. It can be seen as elitist.

We have chosen the stethoscope as our symbol. It is only functional if there is a person at each end — and it is all about listening.

Throughout your career, remember the symbolism of the stethoscope: stay humble; listen; show respect; remember it’s always about the patient; and stay human.