



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES  
ST. AUGUSTINE CAMPUS, TRINIDAD & TOBAGO, WEST INDIES  
OFFICE OF THE CAMPUS PRINCIPAL

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**Address by the Campus Principal**

**Oath-Taking Ceremony for MBBs Graduates, Class of 2017**

**Salutations**

This Hippocratic Oath that we are here to witness was written as a guide to a code of ethical conduct for physicians. Attributed to the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates, while the actual words have changed over the centuries, its intent as a rite of passage remains.

I would like to think that you have entered the field of medicine to positively change lives and to be an active part of the human experience of illness and of health. This evening you are committing yourself to a lifetime of learning since, as you are well aware, your acquisition of knowledge does not and cannot end on graduation day. It is a given that you will be exposed to human emotions at their worst and at their best as you strive to balance the fine line between hope and truth.

You will find out first-hand that Medicine is far from being a bed of roses or, rather, it is - complete with the thorns. Your work days will be long and arduous since illness, accidents, and pain don't only operate between 8.00 a.m. and 4.00 p.m. There will be times when sleep would not be an option and your work/life balance would be so terribly skewed that you'd wonder just why you embarked on this journey. Yet, you were drawn to this calling not simply to 'help people' but to treat disease. After years of study and sacrifice, you have earned the privilege of caring for patients. It is a tremendous responsibility.

If, for that reason only, money must therefore always be secondary to your calling and to your oath to 'do no harm'.

Undoubtedly, as you struggle to gain experience to match your theoretical knowledge, you will look at your salary and think that it can't possibly compensate for the hourly frustrations, the shortage of needed drugs, and the constant risk of liability.

That is, assuming there is a salary.

The question of employment or lack thereof for fully registered doctors has been bruited in media stories, in online chat rooms, and discussed here at The University, particularly at the Faculty of Medical Sciences.

While we all would agree that your calling to the field of medicine is to share your talents, abilities, and gifts for the betterment of your fellow human being; we would all accept the fact that good deeds alone won't put food on the table.

What then are your options?

Several of you share my vision of a University that inculcates a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship within our students, our graduates, and our Faculty. For some, this entrepreneurial and innovative thinking may mean going back to the way it once used to be – offering the service of home visits and becoming the community physician. A 21st century environment might morph that concept into a mobile service that goes to underserved areas. Mobile payment methods make this a viable and safe option.

For others, it may mean setting up a co-operative practice where there is sharing of common expenses or, even, an agreement to work at alternative hours in the same space. Government may even wish to consider having 24/7 service at Health Centres to provide quick and easy access to care at those inconvenient hours when it's often most needed. The State may even undertake the export of the services of our medical practitioners as a means of earning much needed foreign exchange and exposing our doctors to new experiences.

For others still, it would require equipping themselves to move into specialised areas where needs are greatest but qualified, local candidates are lacking. Here we would urge the State to

consider offering funding for scholarships to address the shortage of specialist doctors: Oncologists, Neurosurgeons, Plasmologists, and Cardiovascular Surgeons, to name just some.

Dr. Abraham Nussbaum, author of 'The Finest Traditions of My Calling', spoke succinctly about the privilege of your chosen profession:

“..it is a tremendous privilege to be a physician. People will trust you with their secrets, their fears, and their hopes. They allow you to ask about their lives and to assess their bodies.”

At the other end of that spectrum is the concomitant burden of responsibility to care for and preserve life.

In a few minutes you will swear to the Hippocratic Oath. I wish you all the very best as you take on this incredibly challenging, onerous but, indeed, rewarding role of Medical Doctor.