

Never be Mediocre: Never Settle!

By VANDANA PERSAD



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Ms Vandana Reshma Persad (Bachelor of Science, Optometry, Faculty of Medical Sciences) gave the valediction at The University of the West Indies 4:00pm Graduation Ceremony of Saturday, October 27, 2018. This is her speech.

At the start of our academic journey, we were all taught to envision the future, think about where we want to be, what we want to accomplish and how we plan to get there. Today, we are gathered to celebrate the completion of an important chapter in our lives. While achieving this feat was by no means a simple undertaking, we are just about over the finish line, heads staring up to our respective God, our bodies and minds somewhat exhausted, but still racing, all in anticipation of the celebrations yet to come, and rightly so.

Fellow graduates, let's give ourselves a much deserved round of applause. We have certainly come a long way. To our professors, demonstrators and external supervisors, we could not have done this without your guidance and we the class of 2018 salute you, our academic leaders. Each of us has a unique reason for deciding to be an optometrist, a doctor, nurse, vet, dentist, or pharmacist. For many of us, this is not the end of our academic journey, but rather the start!

Throughout our time at The UWI, we have been taught to think creatively, question the seemingly obvious for hidden truths that lay beneath the surface, and to always push in order to discover our better self. These are the same lessons that have led me to the point at which I am now compelled to implore you, my fellow graduates, colleagues, classmates and lifelong friends, to never settle for only the path now before us.

While many of us need the post-grad employment, once we get a handle on our lives, it is truly up to each and every member of the medical sciences fraternity, sitting before me here, to do all that is necessary to advance their respective field to the highest level attainable. I dare say it's our duty! We as healthcare professionals have a duty of care to our profession, our patients and the institutions we serve.

I have led my academic life by one simple rule: "Never be mediocre; never settle". It is this same attitude I believe we should strive to adopt as we enter the professional world. Our healthcare system is seemingly riddled by institutional inefficiencies and while it is easy to lose morale, the last thing our patients need is professionals who have become comfortable in their positions and have let mediocrity creep its way into patient-care. Aim to master

your craft every day, examine issues facing the profession and think creatively for solutions. We must get involved to better our healthcare system. More importantly, we must all work together as a cohesive unit in order to bring about the change that we want to affect! Every single one of us sitting here has a niche in the health sector, which makes us all equally important and valuable.

We have spent a lot of time together with our respective classes over the last few years: we've made friends, driven each other crazy on occasion, struggled together and, most importantly, succeeded together. You see, regardless of the discipline that we chose to pursue, we have all shared many similar experiences. This is why I want to challenge us to always remember that we have a shared goal now, which is to improve the state of healthcare in our country and by extension, our region.

In that regard, there is one topic that seems to be a bit taboo in our country and I believe that, having completed such a rigorous course load and being a part of the healthcare system, it is only right to make mention of it: mental health awareness. I urge us all to become advocates and to be our brother's keeper. But, most importantly, please take care of yourselves! In order to perform at our best, it is crucial that we do what is necessary to maintain healthy wellbeing. We owe this to our patients, but we also owe this to ourselves.

The lecturers and professors of the Faculty of Medical Sciences are simply unmatched. Your wealth of knowledge, experience and skills have all helped to mould us into the young professionals that we are. I certainly hope that going forward, we are able to marry theory and the practical skills as seamlessly as you all made it appear. We, the graduating class of 2018, sincerely thank you for the continued mentorship and support over the years.

To our friends, family and loved ones, your support has been invaluable throughout these years. Thank you for your words of encouragement and for dealing with our stressful schedules and moods. Without you, we would not be here today.

Most importantly, we must acknowledge and give thanks to our respective faith systems, as many of us can agree that it may have taken some divine miracle for us to get to this point.

While the future may hold many more changes, there are some things that we must maintain throughout our careers. We must be accountable for everything that we do and be prepared to devote our professional energies not only to our patients' needs but also to the unmet health needs of our society as a whole. We must never stop trying to do better; better for ourselves, for our patients, for the profession, and for future generations.

The time has come for each and every one of us here today to step up and be the type of leaders that our twin island republic deserves. Honesty, humility and integrity are, in my opinion, the core foundational qualities of a true leader. I truly believe this is how we should aim to develop ourselves, and just like a healthy diet, I believe that this challenge is a lifestyle choice. One good deed at a time, or one simple act embodying the highlighted qualities, is how we would all play a part in bettering our country.

Class of 2018, it has been my privilege and honour addressing you today.

Congratulations once again!