

I'd like to express my sincere thanks to Dean Compton & his team in the Geisel SOM dean's office, especially the organizing efforts of Ms. Hoisington, for this kind invitation to share some words of wisdom to you on this special day. Welcome parents, spouses, significant others, friends, & Dartmouth colleagues.

Thx to my spouse of 37 yrs, Muriel Thomas, for her steadfast guidance.

"You Mean It or You Don't" is the theme of my brief message to you, the Class of 2026. The title of Hollowell & McGhee's recent book us a borrowed phrase from an answer that a great American, James Baldwin, gave in response to a student's question during a seminar @ Amherst College nearly 4 decades ago.

The *commitment* that you are making today to your patients is sacred. Your respective *On-Doctoring* faculty leads will help you along this critical journey.

In our oncology practice, we strive to ask pts at least 7 KEY questions as part of our patient-centered approach to care:

READ THE 7 QUESTIONS OUT LOUD

In parallel to providing answers to these questions is an implied *commitment* to the welfare of the patient.

With respect to that patient-centric commitment, *“You Mean It or You Don’t”*

I encourage you to reflect on the type of physician you want to be; what are the values that you seek to bring to your pts?

Each of you will have the opportunity and responsibility to define your commitment to pt seen within the 9300 sq mi & 9600 sq mi of NH & VT, respectively; as well as those pts you will be caring for far beyond the confines of New England.

“You Mean It or You Don’t”

As you go forth imbibing new knowledge, I caution you against premature self-congratulations based upon swarmy, unctuous attitudes some peers, teachers, and even patients may display towards you in your journey.

“You Mean It or You Don’t”

In addition, we also urge you to exploit the opportunities to maximize your knowledge. Having regretted not concurrently enrolling into the MPH during my own medical school yrs @ the Univ of Illinois,

I would strongly encourage you to not shy away of adding to your health care education toolbox. The spirit of inquiry & discovery is fertile within the Dartmouth community. Taking advantage of this environment can only help you and your ability to understand the evolving needs of your patients. Today, we are learning to think of SDOH (social determinants of health) when we evaluate patients. This was not always the case. We now see that climate, infectious diseases, income equality, geographic access, residential segregation, and other variables can adversely impact outcomes at both the individual pt level as well as the broader public health population level. These challenges are real and need to be dealt with, hopefully by each of you.

“You Mean It or You Don’t”

Furthermore, do try to resist being readily discouraged when your encounter individuals harboring some lame & impotent turf wars or artificial programmatic silos. You may need mentors and sponsors to help you successfully navigate the arc and landscape of your career development. It is OK to have an array of mentors on your team – actually, it is *normative*. Furthermore, you can serve as a mentor to others and

will help you ultimately become a better practitioner and investigator.

“You Mean It or You Don’t”

Finally, to meaningfully interface with an increasing diverse patient population, it will be helpful if you can find common ground between you and those you care for. As a practicing clinical oncologist, I proactively seek out the common intersections of interest between the pt and myself. It can be a common school, food, concert you attended. During the 2016 fall U.S. election season, I found success in finding common ground w/pts from rural Oregon who would come to our Monday afternoon multidisciplinary lung cancer clinic at the Portland VAMC. At that time, literally everyone was able to appreciate that the Chicago Cubs winning the 2016 World Series was special and transcended race, politics, geography, or even a deep interest in sports. It was then and remains more important than ever to find common ground since it helps to build the relationship & communication channels between pt and provider. It is paramount to developing trust.

To members of the Class of 2026, “You Mean It or You Don’t”. THANK YOU FOR BEING HERE & WELCOME.