



## *Perspective*

# **Words of Gratitude, Encouragement and Strength from the Senior Associate Dean for Graduate Medical Education**

By Kenneth B. Simons, MD

*"The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step."*

Lao Tzu

The journey of becoming a physician is a difficult one; quite understandable given the importance of what the responsibilities are. Thus, completion of the residency or fellowship training portion of this journey in "normal" times is a remarkable achievement. In extraordinary times such as this, it is a feat of incalculable proportions. You, the 2021 graduates of our 98 ACGME accredited programs along with our non-accredited GME programs have been tested like no other prior graduates. The COVID-19 pandemic was your crucible and pushed you in every possible way. Professionally, while your didactic education became virtual, your responsibilities to be physically present to care for patients never did, other than some telemedicine encounters. You wore your PPE as battle armor and you came to work every day to do what you were born to do; care for the sick who required your expertise and more importantly, use your compassion as you learned and practiced your craft under the supervision of faculty. Some of you in fulfilling your responsibilities to patients actually developed the disease, and we are all very grateful that you survived in contradistinction to the 597,000+ dead in the US and 3,730,000+ [worldwide](#). And to your great credit and remarkably, more than 95% of you received one of the vaccines, demonstrating to your patients and the world that science is real and that it matters.

Beyond having to deal with a viral pandemic, something that hadn't happened in more than 100 years, you also had to deal with our country's latest and critical reckoning with health care inequities and systemic racism. America's shameful legacy of slavery and the institutionalization of racist behavior was placed on international display as a result of the murder of George Floyd which fortunately, was filmed by a brave 17 year old woman, assisted by others who watched and confronted the officers who forsook their oath to protect and serve, something you never have and would never do, given each of you took an oath to care for all who come to you in need of your expertise. Mr. Floyd was not the only black person who was killed or maimed this past year as a result of excessive force by police and racist thugs and it is incumbent upon us to

remember all of them. In addition, you witnessed a rise in violence against our Pan-Asian community as a result of the pandemic and the hateful, ignorant rhetoric spewed by some “leaders.” Through it all, you did the right thing for patients, your communities and yourselves. You participated in peaceful demonstrations, you knelt for nearly nine minutes, you wore pins that said Black Lives Matter and others with rainbows, demonstrating to everyone that you cared about your fellow human beings in a committed, real way and that diversity, equity and inclusion aren’t just words in a mission statement, but words to be lived by in a visible, tangible way, each and every day. As you leave here, it is incumbent on you to continue making society healthier for all, better for all and to eliminate racism in all its forms.

The word doctor comes from the Latin *docere* and means “to teach.” Throughout your tenure here, you taught medical and other students, your peers, the staff and the faculty that actions do speak louder than words; all while reading about your patients and their conditions to enhance your knowledge for the benefit of your future patients. And as impressive as all of this is, you accomplished this while also caring for your own families and other loved ones, and as such, they clearly share this august accomplishment with you. In your heart you know better than anyone that without them and their support, this accomplishment would not be as sweet, nor would it have been possible. Their assistance, encouragement and unconditional love during this challenging time was critical to your achievement. They, along with your many teachers and mentors throughout the years, coupled with your own efforts, brought you to this moment and they will always be with you, either in spirit or in reality.

So, years from now when you look back on your time in training and reflect on what you did during one of the most difficult times in medical history and that of our country, remember that you stood tall and did far more than you probably thought was even possible. Your legacy in MCWAH is secure and represented by the following two stories: Two upper level housestaff volunteered to form a COVID-19 intubation team to “protect our older faculty and younger, less experienced colleagues” and by a mother, a first year resident, who said “while it will be a hardship to leave my young child for a month, it’s nice to go to a place where I will be needed and can make a difference.”

You, the graduating housestaff, are inspiring, and you are going to be amazing doctors to whom your patients will look for assistance during what can easily be considered some of the most trying times in their lives: when they are dealing with and overcoming illness. Always remember that while your knowledge and skills are important, it is your humanity, compassion and caring that your patients and their families will remember during those times. It is now time for you to practice independent of supervision and take the next steps on your journey. Godspeed and know that you are ready and we are with you always. Remember, “Your journey never ends. Life has a way of changing things in incredible ways.” Alexander Volkov

Best always,

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