

## Address to Freshman Weekend

By James L. Holly,  
MD Your Life Your  
Health *The*  
*Examiner*  
March 29, 2007

(Author's Note on March 24, 2007, the University Of Texas School Of Medicine at San Antonio – this author's alma mater – held Freshman Weekend to introduce the class of 2011 to the School of Medicine. The following is Dr. Holly's address to this class as the President of the Alumni Association)

I envy you, but it is not your youth that I envy – I envy that you are the inheritors of the experiences and achievements of the first 40 years of our School of Medicine and I envy that you have your lifetime to compound that inheritance. You are the recipients of the legacy and of the trust estate of two generations of students, alumni, faculty, administrators and staff of the University Of Texas School Of Medicine at San Antonio.

Furthermore, you face the challenge and opportunity of a time when medicine has a greater capacity to change the lives, the health and the future of those to whom you minister your art than in any previous generation. You have a virtual *tabula rasa* upon which to record your contribution to the history of your college and to the advancement of your profession.

As you consider your opportunity and your obligation, picture the scene portrayed in *Chariots of Fire*, when the Master of Caius (pronounced “Keyes”) College, University of Cambridge, speaking to the Freshman Dinner in 1918, said:

“I take the war list and I run down it. Name after name, which I cannot read and which we that are older than you cannot hear without emotion. Names which will be only names to you, the new college, but which to us summons up face after face, full of honesty, and goodness, zeal, vigor and intellectual promise. The flower of a generation, the glory of England, and they died for England and all that England stands for and now, by tragic necessity, their dreams have become yours.

Let me exhort you, examine yourselves; let each of you discover where your chance of greatness lies; for their sakes, for the sake of your college and your country. Seize this chance, rejoice in it, and let no power or persuasion deter you in your task.”

By 2011, you of the new School of Medicine will have laid the foundation for who you will be as healthcare professionals. You will have collected the experiences and the memories which will guide you in your quest for greatness.

Hopefully, you will have learned the skills of collegiality and collaboration which **must** supplant the competitiveness which has brought you this far. It is sage counsel to admonish you: Seek greatness; not conquest; seek greatness; not surmounting others. It

is in building and in participating on a healthcare team, and in working for the success of that team that each of you will have the greatest chance of greatness. Greatness is not defined by winning or by wealth; greatness is defined by honesty, goodness, zeal, vigor and of intellectual promise fulfilled in service to others.

Hear and remember the words of Dr. Peter Senge of MIT:

“Most of us at one time or another have been part of a great ‘team,’ a group of people who functioned together in an extraordinary way – who trusted one another, who complemented each others’ strengths and compensated for each others’ limitations, who had common goals that were larger than individual goals, and who produced extraordinary results.

I have met many people who have experienced this sort of profound teamwork – in sports, or in the performing arts or in business. Many say that they have spent much of their life looking for that experience again. What they experienced was a learning organization. The team that became great didn’t start off great – it learned how to produce extraordinary results.”

Recognize and embrace the debt you incur when you accept the opportunity of membership in the class of 2011 Watch another scene in your mind as in the movie, *Saving Private Ryan*, the title character, tremulously, now in his seventies, approached the headstone of Captain John Miller who gave his life that Ryan might live.

In perhaps the most poignant moment in a great film, tears streamed down his face as Ryan plaintively said to his wife, "Tell me that I have lived a good life; tell me that I have been a good man." The sacrifice of others imposed upon Private Ryan a debt only a noble and honorable life could repay. Everyone owes such a debt to someone. The circumstances of that debt may not be as dramatic, but it is just as real.

There are few gifts as great as that of the opportunity to be a physician. Caring for others has always been a sacred trust. It is a trust which should cause each person so honored to tremble with fear that he or she will not have lived worthily of that honor. It should cause us to examine our lives for evidence that we have been good stewards of the treasure of knowledge, skill, experience, and judgment which has been bequeathed to us by our university, by our professors and by the public which funded our education.

What nobler calling could one have than the opportunity to collaborate with others in their quest for health and hope? The honor of trust and respect given by strangers, who share their deepest secrets, knowing they will be held sacrosanct, is a gift which exceeds any pecuniary advantage. The pursuit of excellence in the care of others is a passion which is self-motivating.

Passion is the fuel which energizes any noble endeavor. It is what makes a person get up early in the morning, work hard all day, and go to bed late at night looking forward to the next day. It is a cause of great sadness that today's society is so devoid of true purpose-driven passion. Sadly, many only vicariously experience passion through the eyes and lives of athletes, movie stars, or musicians. Yet, ultimately, personally-experienced passion and purpose are what make life worth living. Those of us who have been allowed the privilege of being physicians, can and should know the passion of a noble purpose every day of our lives.

Never has there been a time when a physician's knowledge and skills could have more positive impact upon the lives and futures of others. Never has there been a time when the role of the physician has been more defined by the concept of "team," in which each participant - doctor, patient, family, nurse, clerk and others – **coalesce** into a vanguard against illness and pain.

Now, well into the last half of my career, I do not crumble by the headstone of one who has given his life for mine, but I do stand humbly before the cornerstone of my life as a physician. I stand there grateful to God, to my parents, to my wife and children, to my University of Texas School of Medicine at San Antonio, to my professors -- among many, Drs. Pannill, Taylor, Wesser, Beller, Fuller, Forland, Gold, Sears, George, Persellin and Cander -- to medical school class mates who challenged me with their abilities and drive. Each has contributed and continues to contribute to the passion and drive born of the honor of being a physician.

The tale is not yet told as to whether you and I shall have been faithful to this great honor, but it is a responsibility which motivates me daily and which must motivate you. To our university and to all who have contributed to the honor of our being physicians, we say, "Thank you."

Today, you begin accumulating a debt of gratitude which can only be repaid with your excellence in service to all who seek your medical counsel or care. As the President of the Alumni Association of the University Of Texas School Of Medicine at San Antonio, I welcome you; I applaud you and I admonish you. Under the leadership of our new Dean and of the faculty, your school will make you proud – it is your responsibility between now and two thousand eleven and for a life-time afterwards, to make your school proud.

**In two thousand eleven, I shall purpose to return for your commencement and inquire as to how well you have pursued your chance of greatness.**

James L. Holly, MD  
President, Alumni Association  
University of Texas School of Medicine, San  
Antonio CEO, Southeast Texas Medical  
Associates, LLP [www.jameslhollymd.com](http://www.jameslhollymd.com)