

Comments for the 5T6 Convocation Dinner - June 6, 2006

Dr Bernie Langer

Dean Whiteside, Honoured Guests, Colleagues.

It is my great pleasure to bring greetings and congratulations from the class of 5T6 to the class of 0T6. This is, for all of us, a rather unique experience, as we look at each other over a distance of half a century. We in the class of 5T6 see you as what we once were. You, on the other hand, see us as what you might become. This is probably a scarier experience for you than it is for us. Let me assure you, however, that we are still everything that we have been, and in this group of veterans that you see here are still the athletes, dreamers, intellectuals, carousers, idealists, pragmatists, iconoclasts, and rabble rousers that we were 50 years ago - we just move a little more slowly now.

Keep in mind, however, that over the past 50 years we have also become many more things than we were then, and these are the same things that you might become in your next 50 years. These include: respected physicians, creative scientists, teachers, innovators, leaders in various fields of medicine and in our communities, parents, grandparents, humanitarians, benefactors, and mentors. You could become any of these things and more before you start to move a little more slowly.

Let me take the opportunity now to give a little unsolicited advice about getting from here to there. This is the prerogative of someone who has made that 50 year journey. I have three pieces of advice to give you - actually I have a lot more advice than that but have only been given five minutes:

- 1) Recognize that information is not the same as knowledge. You have just completed your undergraduate medical studies, and are absolutely stuffed full of information and have access to unlimited additional information via the web. Knowledge is what you need to perform as a physician, and experience is where you transform information into knowledge.
- 2) The transformation of information into knowledge takes place around patient care, and in that process you will find that your patients are your best teachers. Keep that always in mind and lose no opportunity to spend time with patients. Pay attention to what they say to you, respect them for what they are, and get to know them as people, not as diseases that happen to be attached to some person's body. Your career and profession will be richer for your having done so, and your most lasting memories of practice will involve patients.

- 3) Take your work seriously, but don't take yourself too seriously. Choose a field of medicine that you can love, and one that can be fun. You have to be able to laugh sometimes while you work, because there will be many other times that you will more feel like crying.

You may not know it yet, but medicine is the best of careers even if you don't win a Nobel Prize, become a Dean, a president of a startup biotech company, a TV personality or a rich or famous person. A career in medicine, like life itself, is a journey of promise, disappointment, maturation and of fulfillment, where the way that you travel is more important than the destination.

On behalf of all of my colleagues of the class 5T6, I wish you a wonderful journey.