
University of Michigan
2005 Convocation Commencement Speech
June 4, 2005 @ 1:45p

“Behold... the Dreamer Comes”

Thank you, Dean Ascione, for your kind introduction and hospitality this afternoon. I bring you greetings on behalf of the Board of Directors of the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists, the ASHP staff and our 30,000 members. I am truly humbled by the great honor you bestow on me today; namely to have been invited to address this exuberant Class of 2005 and to be part of this time-honored ceremony and tradition.

Faculty members, administrators, families, friends, and members of the University of Michigan Doctor of Pharmacy Class of 2005, I am honored to share with you this wonderful afternoon of convocation and celebration!

And as you sit here, equal parts exhausted and exhilarated, pondering the wide, uncharted future before you, I can sense that you're asking yourselves two very important questions: “Who is this guy, and how long is he going to talk?”

The second question is easy: Long enough to cover the subject, and not a moment more!

As for the first question: I'm a pharmacist of 38 years, a career academic, a former professor and Dean of Pharmacy, and a University Vice President – and now a professional association executive.

Like you, I have spent an appreciable portion of my life pursuing higher education, and I have had wonderful opportunities to apply and share what I have learned. For nearly 10 years now, I have been privileged to lead a professional organization of some 30,000 members, several of whom I know I'm addressing today. Also, I'm an immigrant – the son of Dutch parents who left Europe after World War II, seeking to sow greener fields and pursue our quest for liberty, freedom and economic stability in the United States. In this, I suspect I have much in common with many of you and your families.

But notwithstanding all this common ground, the fact remains that to you, today, I'm an outsider. And frankly, I count it an honor and privilege to be part of this intimate and symbolic ceremony. To be allowed "inside" if you will.

I've presided over many commencements and ceremonies as a member of that unique, extended family forged by classmates, faculty, mentors, and counselors. But those weren't this family, and that wasn't today. So, for me to address your family today – is not an entitlement, not a thing to be taken lightly. It's a real honor!

It is also a special honor to give this address in this premier institution which has made such an important contribution to the mission and direction of ASHP as well as pharmacy on a national and international level. So, before I offer you some of my thoughts around our common profession, allow me to reflect on the significance of today, and the legacy that the University of Michigan continues to create.

Since ASHP's foundation in 1942, many faculty members and alumni of this distinguished institution have played major roles in the founding and development of our organization. Dating back to 1868, when your fellow alumnus, Dr. Albert Benjamin Prescott founded a pharmacy curriculum here at the University of Michigan that took the American pharmacy world by storm. By introducing a new pharmacy program that abandoned the traditional requirement of an apprenticeship as the only qualification to practice pharmacy, Dr. Prescott was completely ostracized. His pioneering

leadership greatly clashed with then “contemporary educators,” and at an APhA meeting in 1871, Prescott’s presence symbolized a significant challenge to the contemporary status of pharmaceutical teaching and training.

Even though Prescott was allowed admittance in the American Pharmaceutical Association as a member, the University of Michigan was denied a seat as a delegate to the APhA Convention. Against great odds and criticism, Prescott persevered and obtained the floor the following day and delivered a memorable address. It was forthright and fair. He championed scientific, laboratory-based education in pharmacy, and it was this philosophy of education which foreshadowed major changes and the ultimate foundation of American pharmaceutical education.

It took three decades for Prescott’s risk-taking and forward-thinking to evolve from radical innovation to accepted practice. His groundbreaking curriculum pioneered monumental changes that were later adopted by pharmaceutical faculties, and was to greatly influence ASHP’s educational directions and policies.

In 1925, Harvey A. K. Whitney, another visionary, who later became a renowned world leader in hospital pharmacy and a mentor to other distinguished hospital pharmacists, joined the staff here at the University of Michigan. Becoming the Chief Pharmacist of the University Hospital in 1927, Whitney later established the first hospital pharmacy internship program in the country.

Prior to the 1920s, hospital pharmacy was not a strong, well-organized component of the profession. However, by the early 1930's the move to raise the status of hospital pharmacy increased. By 1936, a subsection of hospital pharmacists was formed as part of the American Pharmaceutical Association (APhA), and for the first time, hospital pharmacists had a voice in a national organization. So, when hospital pharmacists wanted their own national organization that would represent their interest, Whitney stepped to the plate.

In 1940, Whitney, a great systems-thinker and communicator, suggested at an APhA meeting that there was a need for “a unified organization of hospital pharmacists.” While many opposed Whitney's views, he did not let

adversaries sway his vision. In 1942, after many years of diligent advocacy by Whitney and others, the American Society of Hospital Pharmacists was established, and Whitney became ASHP's first president. ASHP's highest honor, the Harvey A.K. Whitney Lecture Award, to this day honors the memory of this important pharmacy visionary.

In 1943, at the Society's first meeting, Whitney, who was unable to speak due to poor health, wrote a speech for the event and chose Donald E. Francke to read the address. This speech set ASHP's path and direction for the future.

Donald Francke, who was Assistant Chief of Pharmacy at the University of Michigan Hospital, later became Chairman of ASHP in 1945. A visionary entrepreneur, Francke is credited for developing the foundation of ASHP through recruiting membership, achieving financial stability and gaining support from other established organizations.

And while, I did not come here to give you a lecture on the history of hospital pharmacy, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the many other pharmacists from the University of Michigan who paved the way for the advancement of hospital and health-system pharmacy on a national level. They are: John Zugich, Gloria Niemeyer Francke, George Phillips, Warren McConnell, Dwight Tousignaut, and my own Ph.D. supervisor, Dr. Hugh Kabat.

Now, I know you may be wondering what's the "so what" in all this history? Simply, the University of Michigan is indeed a legacy institution. You are a living part of this legacy. Like the Prescott's, Whitney's, and Francke's, this list of visionary leaders is far from complete. There is a visionary spirit in all of us. It is clearly present in this auditorium today.

It is important to realize that while the revolutionary men and women I previously mentioned may be judged in hindsight, they are very much like you and I. When faced with opposition and uncertainty, they nobly struggled, and perseveringly picked each stubborn thorn of resistance and

fear. I'm sure many of you can relate to this throughout your own personal lives and your studies here at the University of Michigan.

However, there are more thorns to pick, and I say to you....the revolution continues. It is your turn to now continue the journey where these great pioneers left off- To continue the legacy.

The pharmaceutical revolution that began more than a century ago, and was fought by University of Michigan founding fathers (and possibly mothers!) still continues. Many battles have been won, but the war is not over.

The torch has now been passed to you to become the next visionaries. The new pioneers; the new trailblazers!

What exactly does it take to be a visionary? To be a visionary involves greatness, reaching through time to bring out the best the world has to offer. A visionary leader anticipates events, influences the future and

enables people to flourish in ways they may have thought impossible.

Visionaries are dedicated, self-driven and hardworking leaders who are able to think beyond the present, endure opposition, and look further and deeper than their counterparts.

Are you up for that type of challenge? I hope so, because ahead of you lie new challenges to face, with even newer obstacles emerging as we speak. The need for new visionaries, with fresh ideas and energy is necessary today more than ever in our profession's history and contemporary climate.

So what are these challenges? Let me name just a few...The health care services sector in this country, as I've been observing, is headed for a train wreck. It is not sustainable in its current form for the future. The dollars to buy it are drying up at their sources, yet they're being spent like so much Monopoly money. The population is living longer, and advances in science and technology are ensuring that, on average, we'll all be living longer still.

“How,” you might ask, “does this concern me?” It concerns you big time! You, as newly minted Doctors of Pharmacy are finding yourselves in the center of a maelstrom of dynamic change and seismic societal shifts.

For example, the patient is moving toward the center of the new health care universe. This patient empowerment is slowly edging the health professions into a critical, but subordinate, consultative role. This change portends profound opportunities for the social role of pharmacists. And we need your revolutionary-thinking to bring it to fruition. The classic images of the pharmacist as the basement-dwelling hospital denizen, or the local storefront proprietor, are fast receding into quaint oblivion, the stuff of yesteryear. Patient-empowerment offers you opportunity to connect in new ways to the patient’s medication-related needs. Simply stated, Patients need you.

I suspect that most of you know where your first job as a pharmacist will be, or you have a number of solid leads or even competing offers. Better yet, if you're starting an ASHP-accredited residency program, that will qualify you for still better opportunities. If you've looked at the numbers, you know that in 2004, more than five percent of vacant pharmacist positions in hospitals remained unfilled. Vacancies in other practice areas exist as well.

Plenty of jobs, then.

It follows then that you'd be well advised, from the first moment you're faced with a choice of employers, to pick someplace where you can love what you do. Because only, once you love what you do, will your passion, drive, and visionary spirit excel and find flight.

This all said, allow me to offer you a few simple parting words of advice on embracing a visionary spirit, based on the ideas I've shared with you today:

- **Be future-focused** and spend your decision-making time looking forward to take in the "bigger picture."
- **Possess a driving spirit** - understand that our profession operates in a fast changing marketplace, so always advance

services that meet the present and emerging needs of patients.

- **Be a risk taker** while remembering to maintain balance between the need to take chances and the need to fulfill your traditional stewardship responsibilities.
- **Be an effective communicator** and learn to express your ideas decisively and stand firm on your convictions.
- **Be a systems thinker-** strive to understand the root of causes, connectedness and forces that shape the issues and challenges; learn to look for courses of action that will exert the highest possible leverage.
- **Appreciate diversity-** it is important to understand that diversity helps to assure a higher level of responsiveness and effectiveness when caring for our patients.
- **Penetrate the ordinary-**always look for new, exciting and creative ways to support the mission and advancement of our profession for the patient's sake.

And Lastly...

Feed your soul – connect to the spirit within yourself and be glad in it.

Today, on this momentous occasion, I call on you to strive for greatness. I challenge each you to revolutionize your thinking and become an active participant in the better care of patients using medicines. As distinctive alumni of this institution, you have inherited an enviable educational pedigree. Wear it proudly and use it proudly!

In closing, I leave you with this thought by Lawrence Thomas:

"All men dream, but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds, wake in the day that it was vanity: but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act on their dreams with open eyes, to make them possible."

Make your dream possible-will you! I wish you Godspeed and every success in your personal and professional lives. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you and to join in this ceremony today. Best wishes to you all!

Thank you.