PARAMEDICS GRADUATION

KEYNOTE SPEECH

FOR

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Hello everyone! It’s an honor to be here and have the opportunity to speak with all of you. (**If there are any people you wish to thank or acknowledge, do so here**). I would like to thank \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for inviting me to be here and share some thoughts with all of you today. Whether you’re a graduate or a distinguished guest, family member or friend, I’m sure you will agree that the field of paramedicine is a very honorable profession and the selfless dedication, rapid response and compassion demonstrated by those who choose to be in emergency medicine is an inspiration to each one of us.

None other than Hippocrates said, “Some patients, though conscious that their condition is perilous, recover their health simply through their contentment with the goodness of the physician.” Considering that he lived about 2,000 years ago and is considered by many to be the “father of modern medicine,” his words have a contemporary significance and mean a lot, especially in the context of emergency medicine. Hippocrates has claimed his place in the annals of medical history. His expression is classic and although spoken way before the practice of paramedicine was established as a bona fide profession, his words ring true for us and our colleagues. For many people, contact with emergency medical personnel is their entry into the healthcare system, and although you may not be entirely full fledged physicians, the work you do and the support you provide, enhances and extends medicine’s role in saving lives. The very nature of an emergency conjures up so many thoughts and feelings-fear, stress, confusion, waiting and watching on the threshold of the unknown-and it is up to the paramedic to treat the patient and his or her family or colleagues with precision, efficiency, capability and compassion. Although most people probably wish they would never have to meet a paramedic in an emergency situation, the dedication and expertise demonstrated by our graduates and their colleagues is an immeasurable comfort in seemingly impossible situations.

Paramedics must be prepared for any situation and must be ready to act at a moment’s notice. Talk about the ultimate multi-taskers! Emergency teams get the 911 call, but many times the crisis they are about to enter can be unexplainably chaotic and it is up to the emergency medical team to maintain order, prioritize care, initiate patient monitoring, assess a situation on all levels, and intend that the chosen plan of action ultimately supports the patient or patients until full medical services are obtainable. A paramedic’s training has to be global, and by that I mean each one must have knowledge and training in any medical situation they may enter. From maternity cases to cardiac arrest; from natural disasters to man made accidents, emergency medical teams need to be prepared to cope. If we’ve heard that nurses have been referred to as “angels in comfortable shoes,” I think it’s safe to say that paramedics are “angels in not–so-comfortable ambulances!” In any event, each one of you graduates are angels-or will be when an emergency arises. The community relies on your dedication, skills and accessibility, whether they know you or not. Patient contact may be fleeting, but that contact has the potential to be some of the most critical care that a person in crisis might ever receive in his or her lifetime. When rapid response and action is a matter of life or death, it is the paramedic whose efforts will support a positive outcome. We, in the profession, are familiar with the term, “the Golden Hour.” Even if patient contact is tenuous, the one thing we know is that the objective in an emergency situation is not necessarily to bring the patient to quality care, but to make sure the quality care gets to the patient as quickly as possible. In some instances, the more time lag there is between the occurrence and the treatment, the more chance the patient has for rapid deterioration when it comes to some injuries, and, as Los Angeles paramedic and author, John Longenecker explains, statistically, the patient’s condition is directly reliant on what treatment is administered immediately. I have known of people-years ago, mind you, who had suffered strokes and because instant care was not administered, hypoxic encephalopathy set in, resulting in coma and ultimately death. Fortunately, now that our nation’s emergency medical force is growing rapidly lives can and will be saved.

Although the field of paramedicine has evolved over the past 40 or 50 years, it has its roots in battlefield triage in ancient times, and studies have shown that the quality of emergency care received at the point of incident has a tremendous effect on a patient’s chance of survival and recovery. In ancient Greece, when a soldier was too old to fight, he was put to work to aid the casualties of war-to tend the wounded before they were able to be removed from the battle scene. As time and knowledge evolved, it was discovered that in modern times, rapid and direct medical response made a critical contribution to survival. In 1966, a white paper was published entitled, “ Accidental Death and Disability: The Neglected Disease of Modern Society.” The report provided data stating that seriously wounded soldiers in the Vietnam War had a greater survival rate than individuals seriously injured in car accidents on California’s freeways. The main contributors to the soldiers’’ survival were the presence of medical military personnel who were able to respond quickly, provide advanced medical attention as soon as possible, and treat the patient before arrival at the nearest medical facility. The report inspired the creation of emergency medical programs throughout the country. Saint Vincent’s Hospital in New York actually established the Mobile Coronary Care Unit in the mid 60’s and other cities and communities followed suit. It’s hard to imagine a world without emergency medicine, and I am sure it is impossible to think what life would be like for millions of people throughout this country and the world, had this medical specialty not been discovered, nurtured and built into the essential community service it is in this day and age.

To all of our graduates here today, I want to wish you a heartfelt congratulations and a tremendous thank you. I know how I feel about the world of emergency medicine. I know the devotion and sacrifice required to serve your community in this capacity. I know that most of the time, you face an impossible task. You have no idea what you might be walking into and split second timing may mean the difference between life and death, but consider this. Without your presence, the odds would look far more grim. Please know that you have been prophetic in your choice of career. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the field of paramedicine is set grow about 33% within the next 10 years. The field is growing at a greater rate than other professions and I think we can understand why. There are more people, the general population is growing older-baby boomers have started turning 60, and although as a group they are younger at heart than their parents were, they will be needing more medical attention while less will be available, and less have access to immediate healthcare. Between budgetary cuts, hospital closings-St Vincent’s in New York, at the very nexus of the birth of emergency medicine and pioneer of its growth just 40 years ago, was not able to survive New York’s economic climate; add to this a growing populace, and the availability of quality emergency care is more precious and critical every day.

Today all of you graduate to join an emergency medical work force that needs you desperately. Your prospective patients need you as well. May they never have to meet you-but we know you’ll be there. You’ll be there in the “Golden Hour” to see to it that essential attention is paid to the patient in need at the time of greatest need. You will be there to support the already overburdened emergency medical staff at your local hospitals. You will be there in the midst of the chaos to manage life or death situations, and more people will survive life-threatening emergencies because you were there. It takes a special kind of person to willingly take on the responsibility to be there to care for people when they need it most-when people are down and out, possibly suffering through a domestic or drug incident or car accident or fire. You’ll be there when, heaven forbid, a person suffers a stroke or coronary while at home, and you’ll be there when a woman in your community goes into labor and needs your immediate support. You’ll be there to save lives in the aftermath of nature’s wrath. You’ll be there when the indigent need medical attention. You will be doing a tremendous service to the members of your community, and just in case, in the melee and its aftermath, people forget to thank you, **I** want to thank you. Please always remember that on this day, you have been acknowledged and appreciated for the service you will do. Words cannot fully express the gratitude that people will attempt to express as you do your best to use your skills and intuition to save lives, so remember, before you officially enter the “combat zone,” how truly thankful we all are for your compassion, service and dedication to save lives.

Thank you all and congratulations!