**CONGRATULATIONS SPEECH**

**FOR**

**KENNETH SAMPONG**

Hello everyone!!! (**Name your wife**) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and I want to welcome all of you to this very well deserved celebration. We've anticipated and dreamt about this moment for the past sixteen years and the day of acknowledgement and recognition is finally here!!! Today our middle daughter, Abena graduates from \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ University and our entire family, including her sisters \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is bursting with pride as we share this milestone with you. If you are here with us in this room we know that you too, also want to congratulate Abena, wish her well, and possibly even share some of the wisdom you've learned and earned throughout your well lived lives.

This lifetime has blessed us with three wonderful daughters, each one unique and gifted in her own special way. As we celebrate Abena’s accomplishments, naturally I look back on what it has been like to be her father…. Several words come to mind… Love, respect, inspiration, intelligence, devotion…. But today the word that keeps reappearing in my thoughts is **pride**. She has always been a loving child and a dutiful daughter, and now she has shown us that her wonderful mind, natural curiosity and dedication to her studies has yielded results of which we can all be proud. There is a theory that someone’s personality is formed very early in life as proven by the paraphrased expression, “Give me the child when she is seven years old and I will show you the adult.” Abena revealed her dedication to her studies at a young age. I remember (**Give one small instance of Abena’s natural talents and curiosity at a young age**) when she was \_\_\_\_\_\_ years old….. She \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Talk about visions of a life foretold!!! …. Even back then she demonstrated a sensitivity for her circumstances. And here we are today witnessing that child grow into her own wisdom and insight as an intelligent, compassionate, **interested** and **interesting** young woman.

A wise man once said, “God wants us to know that life is a series of **beginnings,** not endings, just as graduations are not terminations, but **commencements**. Creation is an ongoing process…...” Abena, today we acknowledge and honor completion as we all walk you towards the future. We’ll recognize the wonderful achievements you’ve accomplished **so far**, and we will take a look and find words of wisdom to launch you toward your next endeavors. Life really is all about creation and learning. We don't stop either process. It is part of the cycle of life that we are in constant movement… Like the blood that courses through our veins, our ideas and experiences are in perpetual motion. There is no time to press the pause button in life. We must keep going.

You've done remarkably well in your “adventures in higher education.” Your grade point average was beyond admirable throughout your college years and your MCAT scores for medical school teach **ME** a thing or two!!! You're a dutiful daughter, a wonderful sister, a great role model to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and a caring friend and classmate. It is because you are so bright and filled with intelligence that we commend you on your plans to take a year off from your studies to synthesize what you've learned and partake in new programs and adventures before you begin medical school, so that you can pick up that next chapter enlivened, refreshed, and eager to conquer the world of medicine…. And believe me…. And you know I speak from experience, the distance, lessons, and clarity you will receive in the coming year will fill you with new perspectives. Make no mistake about it…. The coming year is in no way a “year off.” I think of it as independent study and the chance to learn more about new and different facets of adulthood and responsibility.

As you begin this new phase of your life, I have been thinking… A lot… What wisdom do I want to share… Or what do I want to probably repeat… That will fall on newly educated and receptive ears? I know you might find it hard to believe…but I too, was young once!! (**Wait for the laugh**). What would I have wanted to hear that would have inspired me in my ascension to adulthood and the professional world? Or more aptly, what were others trying to tell me that perhaps I could not yet hear?

Probably the first lesson is to **listen**. This is beyond hearing. It's paying attention. Keep all of your senses finely tuned… Your senses are your own precious instrument. Observe, listen, consider, taste… Hone your skills as you connect to the world around you…. They will be priceless assets throughout the rest of your education and your medical career. No matter which segment of medicine you find yourself, your demonstrable skills will depend on your ability to rely on your senses and your intuition. Peoples’ lives will literally be placed in your hands. Pay attention to the signs and signals around you. Use your gifts to define what you experience. By the way, of course this bit of wisdom is not exclusive to education or medicine. It’s an essential practice in every phase of life. The more we honor, respect, and pay attention to others, the greater will be the capacity to experience true clarity.

Please remember that **overwhelm** is a productive situation in which to find yourself. Whether you’re overwhelmed with work, personal issues, decisions, or emotions, it is in a state of overwhelm that somehow we grow. It is then that we learn our limits and press to conquer and surpass them. We don't know how strong we can be until we are tested. It is in states of overwhelm that we are forced to confront the ways in which we must pace ourselves and protect and safeguard our well being. Use the discomfort of overwhelm to learn to ask for what you need.

Learn the value of **responsibility** and **accountability**. I know you know these concepts but as you enter true adulthood you will be tested more than ever before. It is also expected that you will make mistakes and when you do, own them. Take responsibility, correct and learn. You can't make mistakes if you are doing nothing so realize that errors are a result of attempting to do **something**. You will find that life is not about perfection…. It's about **excellence**. By being accountable and responsible for your work, your communications, and the way you live each aspect of your life, you will approach excellence. Believe it or not, Confucius is credited with saying, “The will to win, the desire to succeed, the urge to reach your full potential… These are the keys that will unlock the doors to personal excellence.” Aristotle taught us that “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.”

Another bit of wisdom I want to share is to respect your possessions, your assets, and your relationships. Respect what you have, from where it came, and the means by which you attained even the smallest item. There is no room in this world for waste or frivolity when it comes to possessions, assets and resources. Nothing in this world is guaranteed. Nothing lasts forever. Honor what you have. It's been said, “ Wealth consists not in having great possessions, but in having few wants.” (**If you want to make a joke you can say**)…. Trust me on this one… **Especially** if malpractice premiums keep going through the roof (**and wait for the laugh**).

One other bit of advice that others may not articulate but that makes a great deal of sense, is that I suggest you remove some simple words from your vocabulary…. Words like “always,” “never,” and “fair.” In medicine and in life you will find absolutes don't exist. Making declarations including the words “always” or “never” expose you to unnecessary challenges. And if someone does challenge you when those words are used, remember that life is not fair. Bryant McGill reminds us, “The world is not fair, and often fools, cowards, liars and the selfish hide in high places.” But when that happens…. Remember the early advice… Look, listen, and trust your gut.

Functioning and prevailing in the adult world takes thought and time, articulation, observation, and consideration. I know you possess these traits in abundance. It is time to use them to build the rest of your life.

The English poet Robert Browning said, “Ah, but a man’s reach should exceed his grasp, or what is heaven for?” Abena, you have done a brilliant job as a daughter, sister, friend, and student. As you begin to write the next chapters of your life we want you to know, without any hesitation or doubt, that we love you, we’re proud of you, and we support you in all that you attempt. Set your goals so that you can stretch and reach just further than your comfort zone…. That’s what gives life it's purpose. As you prepare to (**say one or two sentences about what Abena’s plans are for the next year**) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, remember what you've learned, remember to listen to your inner voice that will guide you, and never forget that your mother and I are always here to encourage you and give you whatever strength and wisdom we can offer as you find your way in the world. You are an exceptional young woman and I know I speak for everyone here when I say that we wish you health, happiness, good fortune and success throughout your life.

Congratulations!! We love you!!