



Respected Rector Professor Gruchała, Deans and Members of the Senate of the Medical University of Gdańsk, Distinguished Guests, Families of our Graduates, and – first and foremost – you Dear Colleagues, Graduates of the year 2020.

First of all, I would like to thank you for the invitation to share this special moment with you. For me it is and has always been a great privilege and pleasure to witness our Graduates' Grand Finale ceremony before leaving Gdańsk after 6 years of studies, with the long-desired medical diploma in their hands. Your hard work, persistence and sacrifice have brought you here and opened the gates to continued medical education and professional medical career, whether at healthcare institutions or medical research centers. Congratulations! Here I am embracing all the ED Graduates of 2020, including those who have already received their Diplomas and are not participating in this ceremony.

Over the years of studies at our university you have learned and experienced a lot, been tested even more, and withstood much challenge and pressure. All those experiences of ups and downs, successes and failures, ecstasy and despair, shared with your colleagues, have made you stronger, more self-confident, and much united. Kind of "brothers in arms". And friends forever. May your friendships last and grow. And please, remember us here, keep in contact and share with us your feedback for us to continue improving as a medical university and academic community. I hope to make connections with you on LinkedIn and other social media, and maybe meet you live in Gdańsk again or in your home country.

Today we are meeting on this unique and festive occasion of your graduation, but also at a very special moment in the life of entire humanity, when the coronavirus pandemic is changing people's lives around the planet.

At this moment, I would like to share with you two thoughts. The first one is about knowledge versus beliefs. During your medical studies you have successfully completed about 100 subjects, acquired knowledge and understanding of facts, mechanisms and processes which are proved and known to exist in the human body at molecular, cellular, tissue, organ, and system levels. You have got to know a human from within. You have also studied diseases, pathogens, environmental factors detrimental to human health, and the treatments which are available for a variety of health conditions. None of them were presented to you as just objects of faith, but rather as truths emerging from research, experiment, measurements and observation. In short, medical sciences which you have just studied, rely on facts and not magic products of imagination. Therefore, in their daily practice medical professionals step firmly on the solid ground of evidence-based medicine: facts and logical reasoning.

The other thought to share with you is about something we all need in life, something non-scientific, powerful but fragile, evergreen and volatile at the same time – HOPE. Well, looking at the world around us today, when climate on Earth and our natural environment suffer from massive and rapid changes towards the point of no return, when so many countries are affected with the pandemic, economic problems and lack of wise leadership, it seems there would be no better moment to speak about hope. First, what is hope? A desire for bad input to produce good output? Faith in fate's mercy or miraculous turn of a friendly card?

There is a bitter proverb saying hope is the mother of fools. But there is also a soothing reply saying it's better to have such mother than none. What does hope have to do with medicine, your profession? Oh, a lot indeed.

Your patients will have hope, literally seen in their eyes, words and gestures, hope for a cure, for successful treatment to their illnesses, for your competence, for a few more years or at least months to live. To live long enough to see their children pass exams, find a job, start independent lives. Or to live long enough to get cured of their currently incurable disease. And, to add some hard science, since the founding research by Dr. Robert Ader in the mid-seventies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and his invention of psychoneuroimmunology, it has been well proved that patients' optimistic attitude, their hope, favors healing and improves clinical outcome. Hope, positive attitude, are patient's and doctor's great allies in the therapeutic process and the most cost-effective element of treatment plan.

Hope is also very important for the physician. The strong belief that ambitious tasks and plans are achievable, the hope we really are capable of reaching high levels of expertise and skills, and the hope the patient's diagnosis proves less dramatic and the condition responds to the available treatments, help physician in everyday work for the benefit of the patients and entire community. However, there is a problem. Doctors know a lot. They know the possible unfavorable scenarios, they know the statistics, they know the odds are sometimes very much against the patient's survival or recovery. This is why they say the most difficult patients are doctors themselves. Their fountain of hope is somewhat suppressed by their knowledge and understanding of the possible threats, which then appear closer, bigger and more malignant.

Therefore, for both patients and doctors, it is essential to take good care of anything that feeds their well-being and optimism. Love, bonds with the dear ones, their care and support, quality leisure time spent with friends, as well as physical fitness, good sleep and healthy work-rest balance. Your noble profession of a physician implies lifelong learning, so it is of utmost importance for you to find your best way between your professional obligations and personal needs.

At this special moment, when hope has become even more valuable currency and precious companion due to the global turmoil and uncertainty, I would like to wish health and safety to you and all your Dear Ones, success at learning, training and daily medical practice, wise, fair judgment and the courage to disseminate truth and bring enlightenment in your communities, and best of luck and happiness for all the years to come. Thank you!

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