

REMARKS FROM DEAN MARK RICHARDSON
OHSU School of Medicine
2013 Hooding & Commencement Ceremony
Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall
June 3, 2013

Dr. Mejicano, thank you for the kind introduction.

To all our guests – family, friends, fellow faculty and colleagues – welcome. We're glad you're here.

Your support and guidance have been crucial to allowing our graduates to be here today, celebrating this particular moment in time.

Our graduates would not be here if not for you, for those moments when you provided wise counsel and support and, probably, groceries, laundry and babysitting.

To our graduates, congratulations! You've done it. In all, 530 degrees will be conferred today.

Today's ceremony honors the achievements of the School of Medicine's Class of 2013, in this, our quasiquicentennial year. In other words, OHSU is celebrating the 125th year of our founding.

In 1887, we began as a program to educate doctors. Today, 125 years later, we are still that and so much more.

We are physician assistants and informaticists.

We are scientists and policymakers.

We are all leaders in health and health care.

This moment marks a transition, and you are moving into your future professions.

And what a future it will be.

You are entering your profession at a moment in history when we are poised to realize a new kind of future for human health and health care.

I see this particular moment in time as a threshold. A door to that future.

We're stepping up into an unprecedented era, an era of accelerating change, big change – across all facets of health and health care.

To illustrate that change, I'd like to share a brief story with you from my very first years as an attending physician, the very first years after my own commencement and hooding.

Many years ago, I cared for a patient, a young boy, who had a mitochondrial disease called MELAS Syndrome. That mitochondrial disease that he acquired through genetics caused him to have an illness that we could not correct.

We did everything available at the time, we used all our knowledge and technical expertise, but we could not change the tragic outcome.

Today, a door has opened to a future in which that child could lead a normal life.

Why? The transformative power unleashed by our knowledge of human genetics.

Several months ago, one of our scientists, Shoukhrat Mitalipov demonstrated exactly how this might be applied to human health through gene therapy.

Cell mitochondria contain genetic material, and these genes are independently passed from mother to infant. When certain mutations in mitochondrial DNA are present, a child can be born with severe conditions like that of the young boy I saw as a patient many years ago.

Dr. Mitalipov demonstrated that by successfully “swapping out” human cell cytoplasm, which contains the mitochondria, but leaving the natural DNA, certain inherited diseases can possibly be prevented.

Think about it. Inherited diseases prevented. It’s a game changer.

The news of this milestone in laboratory science was shared around the globe.

Aspects of this work are controversial, I realize, but Dr. Mitalipov saw what could be done in this era of change, and he walked boldly through the door.

We are entering a golden age of biomedical science. New cures are on the horizon because of the research that has come before us and because of these and other discoveries that you – those of you sitting here today – will make.

This golden age will usher in an era of individualized, personalized medicine in which aspects of health care will be determined by unique genetic testing, by unlocking the disease profile of each person, fundamentally reshaping how we approach individual health care.

At the very same time we are poised to enter this golden age of biomedicine, health care reform is spreading across the nation, and our systems of care are undergoing profound transformation — with a new — and welcome — focus on wellness, prevention and team-based care, and population health.

Of course, this is not the first great period of change in medicine. Nor will it be the last.

When I sat in your place, many, many moments ago, we were in the midst of the Era of Antibiotics, which includes anti-infective agents, antivirals and vaccines.

During the last 50 years, these therapies have saved far more lives than possibly any other form of medical intervention. Penicillin. The flu vaccine. Retroviral drugs.

But as miraculous as this Antibiotics Era was, we are now poised for an enormous collective leap forward in human health.

Looking forward 50 years from now at our dodransbicentennial, the dean from this medical school will give a commencement address — likely delivered through one of those virtual holograms we've all seen in *Star Wars* — marking this moment as the beginning of the Genetics Era.

As a society, we've been talking about the promise of genetics for more than a decade, but our knowledge has advanced — thanks in part to research driven by OHSU — so that your career will be defined by this transformative knowledge.

We're moving into an astonishing era, and I'm hopeful it will eclipse the antibiotic one I experienced.

Graduates, I'm envious of all you have in front of you.

This is YOUR era of change. Your moment to turn the tide against tragic outcomes.

Your doorway to walk through.

I have tremendous optimism for our next 125 years.

I would say good luck, but you don't need it.

The moment has arrived. Step through the door and take advantage of the time before you.

You will take OHSU with you in your careers, and we'll be watching you with pride.

Congratulations Class of 2013.

Thank you.

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