

## "Healing Beyond Science"

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Featured on Wing of Zock, "**Healing Beyond Science**"

The title of this post is framed within quotation marks because the words are not mine. They were delivered by **Mary Fisher**, an author, artist, and AIDS advocate on the occasion of receiving an honorary degree as part of the commencement of the Charter Class of 2015 from the Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine (OUWB). Wing of Zock invited me to provide a follow-up to my post published earlier this year, "**Kindness Beyond Curriculum**," where I described the underlying innovations that OUWB brings to medical education as a new medical school. I invite you now to pause and listen to Fisher's address. [Fast forward to the 4:40 mark to skip the conferral of the degree if you wish.]



Fisher asked our graduates, "I understand that you must ask me to show you my body, but do you understand it is an act of intimacy, and that I would like you to show me your soul?" As Founding Dean, I and my leadership team asked ourselves, "Did we prepare our students for this challenge?"

We built OUWB on the premise that mastery of science and skills is essential, but a medical education limited to science is incomplete. Every aspect, every detail invested in building OUWB – the curriculum, the people, the learning environment, the community engagement – was designed to prepare our students to engage in healing beyond science through careful attention to how they live their lives in medical school.

Is there any evidence to suggest that we are succeeding?

At commencement, my thoughts turned to a time when I toured the construction site of a new OUWB classroom. After learning about the new technology being installed, the foreman turned to me and related that earlier in the week, OUWB students took the same tour and thanked him and his crew for building a beautiful classroom in which to study. He told me, with some emotion, that this was the first time in his construction career that anyone had thanked him for his work. Perhaps, he reflected, wearing a hard hat meant to some that he wasn't educated, or had no need to be appreciated.

OUWB views the expression of gratitude to construction workers and custodians, among others, as critical practice for thanking nurses, pharmacists, social workers – all members of the health care delivery team. This practice lays the foundation for teamwork. Moreover, the institutional expectation that gratitude be expressed is an antidote to physician arrogance: It is difficult to be arrogant while thanking someone.

Although the question of whether a medical student should attend his or her own graduation **has been debated**, the OUWB student body (M1-M3) volunteered to attend commencement, **dressed in their white coats**. Why? They wanted to support the graduates and to be inspired by their example. The student body intends for this to be an annual OUWB tradition. OUWB is a community. The students refer to **OUWB as family**, a support system. We suspect that this sense of community elevates the heightened attributes that led to their selection as compassionate and empathetic people.

And then there is the matter of the oath that our graduates **recited**. The class worked for four years on their graduation oath. Based on the framework of the Declaration of Geneva, this Oath of the Class of 2015 included promises that are not found in the classic Oath formulation, promises that inspired us: "I will care for myself so that I am able to care for others. I will advocate for my patients' best interests ... I will acknowledge my limitations and ask for help when I need it ... I commit to lifelong scholarship and will let evidence be my guide ... I will be brave in the face of adversity ..."

Did the Charter Class excel in the traditional medical education? Each member of the charter class placed into a

residency position in the discipline of their choice, including the “super-competitive” fields. OUWB sent graduates to the most competitive and prestigious residency programs in the United States. Our full match results are **online**.

In my previous post, I made reference to a medical student who was **interviewed** by the Detroit News in August 2014, who said, “Not only are they showing me how to be a kind and compassionate doctor, but they show me all the time how much they care about me as a person... They model the behavior that they want from us.” Just a few weeks ago, this student became one of 55 medical students nationwide selected for the year-long **NIH Medical Research Scholars Program** between the third and fourth year of study. The OUWB first match and the experience of this OUWB medical student and others suggest that **anxiety** over the ability of new medical schools to achieve excellence in the medical sciences may be unfounded. One can generate medical students who are both brilliant and kind.

The occasion of the OUWB charter class graduation generated interest by the local press. In publications like the **Detroit News** and the **Detroit Free Press**, students revealed that they chose to come to OUWB because of its distinctive vision. Just as we selected them for experiences and attributes that would predict academic success coupled with empathy, compassion, and engagement, they selected us for pairing science with mastery of the personal characteristics of physician capable of showing one’s soul to a patient.