

## **Chancellor Michael F. Collins address at UMass Chan Medical School's 52nd Commencement**

**Sunday, June 1, 2025**

This morning, I stand before you in a hope-filled moment!

How could it be otherwise? Before me are our graduates who have completed rigorous courses of study, been stewarded in their education by an incredibly committed faculty, and now, enter the worlds of science, nursing and medicine imbued with spirit and enthusiasm.

These graduates are the BEST! They are yours, and now, ours; as forever, we are linked in supporting them along their chosen paths.

Surrounded by a world of uncertainty, with precision, they have succeeded in honing their scientific and clinical skills. They represent the future of our professions and with their grit, tenacity and purpose, that future is bright!

But that world of uncertainty casts a shadow that must not be allowed to dim the brightness of their futures.

Those of our graduates who shall enter clinical fields have learned that preserving the human dignity of each individual with whom they interact should be their stated purpose. To succeed in this high calling, those for whom they shall have the privilege to care will need ease of access to their clinical services; equitable and affordable health care coverage and therapeutics; and access to housing, food, and education.

Into the future, technological developments and artificial intelligence should enhance clinicians' capabilities and bandwidth, but each of you should remember that when serving those entrusted to your care, holding the hand of your patient with esteem could represent the most meaningful moment of engagement they and you shall experience. Your recognition of the importance of these moments fills me with hope!

For those of you who are entering into years of scientific discovery and innovation, our nation and indeed our world are fortunate that you have made such an important commitment. At this moment,

the world is uncertain for you and us, but because of our respective and fervent belief in the importance of science, I remain hopeful.

Consider the carefully cultivated research enterprise that our nation has invested in throughout half of the last century and into this new millennium. The American biomedical research enterprise is the envy of the world. In my travels across the globe, leaders of institutions and governments with whom I have met have expressed how impressed and envious they are that our nation has made such extraordinary commitments and enduring contributions to science.

These commitments to science have attracted and welcomed the best and brightest minds, unhindered by nation of origin, to come together to study, innovate and discover at our nation's universities, scientific institutes and academic medical centers. There, they have undertaken scientific exploration in a principled, ethical and rigorous manner that has directly benefited human health, scientific knowledge, and nursing and medical clinical practice.

This artfully constructed, bipartisan commitment, an unseen but very real covenant between our nation's major stakeholders, has powered the innovation economy of the United States for more than 70 years and has positioned America as the pinnacle of cutting-edge biomedical research, lifesaving vaccines and therapeutics; and human progress for which we should be most proud!

At UMass Chan, we can be proud of what we have built!

As chancellor, it has been the privilege of a lifetime to serve this faculty, some of the smartest, most innovative, collegial, and creative talents one could find anywhere in the world. They could have chosen any profession or career but rather, theirs was a commitment to scientific discovery and innovation.

Look at their accomplishments:

- Two Nobel prizes in Physiology or Medicine for fundamental discoveries in RNA biology;
- More than a dozen inductions into the National Academies;
- Scientific society presidents and awardees too numerous to mention;
- More competitive NIH funding than more than one-third of all U.S. states;
- Pioneering of new lifesaving molecularly targeted platform technologies;
- Invention of dozens of specific, potentially curative, oligonucleotide-based and gene therapy products for single gene disorders;

- Relentless pursuit of clinical trials for previously incurable diseases such as ALS, lupus, diabetes, spinal muscular atrophy, Canavan disease, Tay Sachs Disease and Sandhoff Disease; and
- Sustained and faithful dedication to the missions of UMass Chan with their extraordinary commitment to educating the next generation of biomedical scientists and caregivers while advancing the frontiers of human knowledge and thereby improving the health and well-being of those in our Commonwealth and throughout the world.

It gives me such hope for the future knowing these are the faculty in whose hands the future of scientific discovery and training depends!

In the uncertainties that characterize these days, our bedrock assumptions, our faith in and respect for science, and our shared commitment to funding, show signs of fracturing.

Our nation and the world have benefitted from the virtues of a funding cycle that has made the United States an innovation superpower.

The trust and collaboration between our government and the nation's universities that has been in place for generations has: incentivized scientists and universities to pursue basic and novel biomedical research; catalyzed essential and mutually beneficial partnerships with industry to advance those discoveries; assured that the fruits of innovation, discovery and clinical trials have the opportunity to develop into life-saving drugs or clinical applications and therapeutics; and spawned entire new fields, platforms, technologies, medicines and, in some cases, industries.

This fertile and interconnected ecosystem, nurtured and sustained by federal funding, has resulted in a vibrant constellation of research success; supported job creation and the purchase of research-related goods and services; and resulted in the creation of companies that foster innovation and become tax revenue generating. In fact, on an annual basis, the economic multiplier of our medical school benefits the Commonwealth of Massachusetts more than \$2 billion! We are more than well worth the investment!

Yet, our nation's success is neither pre-ordained nor guaranteed. This amazing ecosystem will become unrecognizable if our expectations for the continued long-standing investment in biomedical research are not realized.

Science is important; too important to politicize or make partisan.

We have come too far to allow the hope and promise of science to be soured by distrust and pessimism.

Together with our state and federal leaders, we must engage in a purposeful and thoughtful dialogue to ensure that our nation continues to invest in the future of science and to guarantee that our children and grandchildren, similar to the graduates who are before us today, are inspired to pursue a scientific career that our society values and invests in.

To those of you who today make a commitment to scientific discovery and clinical practice, you realize that research brings hope to the human condition. So, too, should those who are the stewards of our government.

Like Carolyn Clancy, will you make a life-long commitment to quality initiatives and the care of our nation's veterans, invest in research to thoughtfully study their needs, assure access to clinical care and make good on our nation's commitment to forever provide for the medical needs of those who selflessly served our nation?

Like Lynn and Majid Jafar, will you commit to the needs of those with single gene defect diseases, find resources to study, innovate and eventually cure the 7,000 plus diseases that are rare but universally impact the lives and families of those so afflicted?

Like Marcia McNutt, will you rise to a national leadership position in nursing, medicine or science and use your voice to assure that our nation's commitment to science is steadfast and fulsome?

Research is not just about probabilities; it is about possibility!

Research is not just about chance occurrences; it is about chances for survival!

Research is not just about the impact on prognosis; it is about its effect on hope!

Research allows those confronted by disease and difficult diagnoses to benefit from the power of optimism.

Research advances offer patients the power to face the new day; to meet adversity with resolve; to be inspired by the love and comfort of their families and caregivers; and to recognize and revel in the wonders of life.

So, let me return to where I began. As you now step forward to enter our professions, for me this is a hope-filled moment.

Why am I such an optimist: Because each of you, through your steadfast and selfless commitment to serving others, is the brightest beacon of hope!

Despite the uncertainties of the day, I refuse to be cynical because each of us, through our knowledge, intellect and advocacy can come together to assure your beacon and that of our stellar medical school are not dimmed!

Please know that as you begin in your chosen fields, henceforth, we shall always take great pride in calling you one of our own!

Congratulations and Godspeed!