

First-year medical students honored at White Coat Ceremony

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Incoming first-year medical students, as well as their friends and families in the audience, heard from many members of faculty and university leaders during the ceremony, all of whom shared advice on not only the next four years of their medical education but on the remainder of their careers. (Photo by Vincent Postle)

Excitement filled the air as new medical students filed into McAlister Auditorium on Sunday afternoon. Like generations before them, the 190 students of the Class of 2028 were beginning their medical careers with the White Coat Ceremony, during which they donned, for the first time, the white coats they will wear for the next four

years.

The students, as well as their friends and families in the audience, heard from many members of faculty and university leaders during the ceremony, all of whom shared advice on not only the next four years of their medical education but on the remainder of their careers.

President Michael Fitts opened the ceremony, welcoming the new students to Tulane and to their medical journey. "Today, you are joining a tradition that goes all the way back to the founding of Tulane University, nearly 200 years ago," he told the students. "In the early 19th century, diseases like yellow fever and cholera were devastating the Gulf South. In 1834, seven young physicians got together and decided to establish a school to train doctors: the Medical College of Louisiana. Over the years, that medical college grew into Tulane University."

Fitts then reminded the students of Tulane's motto: *non sibi sed suis*, not for one's self but for one's own. "I want you to think about that motto every time you put on your white coat," he said. "Tulane physicians are motivated by a deep desire to serve others."

Dr. Lee Hamm, senior vice president and dean of the School of Medicine, instructed the students, "When you put on your white coat, you need to bring certain things with you: you need to bring compassion, you need to bring kindness. Your patients need to trust you."

The keynote Dr. Wallace K. Tomlinson Lecture was delivered by Dr. Randolph Roig, chief of staff at the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System. He spoke to the students about the challenges and joys that await them as medical students and as doctors. "The challenges of being residents, and truly of being a doctor who cares, are great," he said. "It's easy to get lost in your responsibilities and to forget about those around you."

He recalled a time when he was a medical student on rotation, searching high and low for strawberry ice cream for a patient. He resolved then not to let himself be too busy to make the lives of his patients a bit easier. "No matter how busy I am, I always find the time to acknowledge the people around me," Roig said.

After the speakers, each student was introduced as they walked across the stage to receive their stethoscopes. It is a Tulane tradition that, as they are introduced, each student shares a word that someone would use to describe them. They described themselves in a variety of ways, from compassionate, to enthusiastic, to coachable.

The ceremony closed with a recitation of the Tulane Physicians' Oath, defining the commitment and dedication students make to their patients and themselves and reminding them of their duty to practice medicine with compassion and professionalism.

"This is something that all of us have worked towards our entire lives," said Jessica Reid, one of the students, "and it's finally reaching the point where we get to do what we've always dreamed of."

"I really just want to make all of the people who helped me get to this point proud and be the best physician I possibly can," said Zachary McManus, another student.

The students then got right to work, attending their first classes on Wednesday.