Dear Students

Tomorrow morning you will meet your first patient, armed with some knowledge (I hope) and the white coat you receive today. Usually, when you graduate in two years (and your knowledge would be only a bit better) you will be asked to promise to abide by the Hippocratic Oath in front of your colleagues and your parents.

One man saw something wrong in the timing of things. Arnold P Gold, professor of pediatric neurology at Columbia University, who was interested in the professional and humanitarian aspect of medicine; and had established the Arnold P Gold Foundation to foster those values in medical professionals; He thought that taking the oath at the end of medical school is a bit late. After all, students start to see patients in their clinical years, and Hippocrates administered his oath to his students while they were working with him. Realizing that students should learn the humanitarian principles of the medical profession in tandem with their scientific knowledge, Arnold Gold convinced the School of Medicine at Columbia University to hold the first white coat ceremony in 1993; where students would receive their white coats, the symbol of the profession, and promise to abide by its ethical and humanistic principles. Thus to take the Hippocratic Oath before laying the healing hands on their first patient. Through this, he sent a message to medical schools that teaching ethics and humanism should go hand in hand with the science of biology; and as early as medical school, not after graduation. In his words: “we need to stress the CARE in healthcare”

This ceremony has later spread to many other medical schools in America and the world, and has been supported by the Arnold P Foundation, sometimes financially if the need be. Medicine is a vast
and complex science, and often students and physicians are so immersed in the study of the biology of the human body, they forget the patient. We cannot be only mechanics, because our patients are not machines. Of course it is the responsibility of medical schools to incorporate the principles of the profession in their curricula. The Salim El Hoss program in Medical Ethics was created at AUB last year to fill some of those gaps in our education. So, as we teach you the Science of Medicine we will also teach you how a Doctor should behave; and that starts today.