

## **FACULTY OF MEDICINE GRADUATE CEREMONY**

**June 19, 2020**

Habib George El-Khoury

### **Student Speaker Speech**

President Khuri, Dean Zaatari, associate and assistant deans, esteemed professors and members of the faculty of medicine, families and friends of the graduates, virtual attendees and last but not least, my fellow graduates of the class of 2020.

It is an honor to address my fellow classmates tonight, whose dedication and perseverance have sustained me and sustained each other over the past four years. Four years that were filled with enriching experiences, uncomfortable ones, emotional moments and some emotionally-draining ones, death and life, and finally some burning tires, a socioeconomic crisis and last but not least a COVID19 pandemic.

But no matter what, we are lucky to finally be here tonight and celebrate our graduation and end of medical education. Graduation? Well more like a marriage celebration. Some people think that a career in medicine is actually a first marriage – only if, you find time for another one to come of course. Now the “end” part of my previous statement was also not too accurate, as this is only the beginning and not the end. The beginning of life-long learning, healing and caring.

Personally, I would describe my experience in medical school as more of a challenge to adapt. Adapting to a certain system – don’t get me wrong we do learn a lot, and have a substantial amount of knowledge, but most importantly we learn how to adapt to a system. Adapt not only in a way where you learn to apply ethical principles of care, or follow certain criteria to reach a diagnosis, or an algorithm to know whether a patient qualifies for this or that treatment, no. But adapting to a system in which you are the compassionate, resilient, knowledgeable, humble and serving physician. A system that nurtures uniformity but at the same time leaves an open door, or more of a window, to one’s unique humanity.

Once you have adapted to this system and learned the rules of the game, you can now design your own game, and to each his own. This system allows you to learn the skills you need to direct your career and profession the way you want, customizing it as much as you want and adding to it the flavor you want, which will make each and every one of us the most unique physician, and thank you AUB for this system.

This system is what made us the physicians we are becoming today, and this is the system that was the basis for success for many generations of physicians that graduated from our alma mater. We all have witnessed the academic excellence of our institution while attending abroad rotations in some of the most prestigious medical centers around the world, where most of our mentors there recognized AUB as the educational pillar of the Middle East.

This system is based on continuous change and improvement, fueled by its own students.

A system, that not only achieves academically but also humanistically. In fact, we are here tonight celebrating the graduating class, their achievements and the capabilities they acquired. Capabilities that are beyond one's imagination, not for their own, but for others – How capable they are, to do for others. Those capabilities are part of the inherent nature of the profession, true, but those are nurtured in the system that shaped us.

AUB has taught us to care for the sick and serve them. To serve anyone and everyone, coming from any background, regardless of religious beliefs, skin color or ethnicity. We were taught to heal the patients that could not be saved. We were taught not to only do things the right way, but to go out of our way to have the right things done. I have personally witnessed many of my classmates, which I now call family, staying late at the hospital, dragging their feet behind them after long hours of work, making sure they attended to their patient's care, fully. Countless community outreach initiatives saw the light with our generation. AUB made sure that the humane medicine we practice will never be restricted to the walls of a hospital. And this is what, we will forever remember, every time we will think back to this day. Not the knowledge we gained, but the foundation of humane medicine, that we will forever hold with us.

A system that is behind one big family of fresh-graduating physicians, eager to advocate for their patients, serve their community, and contribute to the field of medicine.

Not pretending that what is yet to come will be easy, there will be more challenges, we will have our fair share of mistakes to be made, we will face bumps along the road that will feel like un-climbable mountains, we will always be racing against the fast-evolving medical field. But we were made ready for this, to have insight to our own mistakes, to remember that our mission is worth climbing those mountains and getting across them and is worth pushing and racing against this fast-paced field to provide our patients with the very best we can.

And those words, they're not for today, a day filled with happiness and pride. They are for the days when doubt will creep back in to our careers, when we will feel that our plates hold more than we can handle, and the days when we will reconsider whether all of this was worth it or not. And these days will keep coming back.

My fellow graduates, I can't help but remember our very first week of medical school, back then, we had no idea what was waiting for us. We were still getting to know each other during the breaks in-between our first lectures and anatomy classes, most of us thinking; those are just some classmates with whom I will be sharing a learning experience. And then, it all began, we started sailing our ship across the turbulent waters of medical school. Facing instances where we had to rely on each other, times where we had to learn from each other and times where we had to support each other to make it through this tough system and get the best out of it. And along the way, friendships and unbreakable bonds were being formed, under the larger family name of "the special class of 2020". Friendships that will last for life, as most of you know. You have witnessed my toughest moments and have supported me through it all, have taught me more than anyone else, and I thank you for that.

Back then, while we were all sitting in those big lecture halls, we knew that we all shared something, a certain level of scientific curiosity, a drive to help others, a motivation to achieve. But little did we know that what brought us together is being blessed with the calling of a career in medicine. This is the reason why each and every member of the graduating class is sitting here today.

Graduating during these unprecedented and uncertain times is not comforting. Our sailing ship had a hard time finding its way, got lost in the void for a while, but it finally did berth. The world is changing by the second and so is the practice of Medicine. Many of our plans have been distorted and some of us, thrown back into the void. But this is transient. AUB-educated physicians will always find their way through.

With the many torments that plague our country, our community members will need doctors for their body and soul, more than ever. And I am more than proud to say that you are the doctors who will be caring for my family and friends in the coming years.

Our beloved country's current situation might not be the most appealing to start a career locally, but I know that someday, many of us leaving, are motivated to come back and join the rest in serving the Lebanese community and pay it forward by educating younger generations of physicians.

Four years later, as we are ending this chapter of our lives, we realize that we are immensely in debt. With the financial one being the lowest on the list here. We are in debt first to the patients we have cared for, who have taught us more than one can imagine. We are in debt to our home institution and to all the positive and negative role models we encountered along the way. We are in debt to our mentors and professors who guided us through this road. We are in debt to each other. And most importantly, we are in debt to our families and friends who have supported us through this journey continuously, our parents who have put in so many sacrifices to help us accomplish our dreams and graduate as proud AUB graduates, and I would like to extend my warmest gratitude to my own parents here.

Finally, our esteemed deans, professors and members of the housestaff, thank you for those four wonderful years of education and character-building.

To my fellow classmates, those I had the privilege to meet as a medical student, those I shared the same classrooms with as an undergraduate AUB student, to those seventeen of us who have shared the playgrounds of the International College, to those I have shared a home with for the past four years ... I cannot wait to witness all the accomplishments of each and every one of you in the years to come ... Congratulations!

Lucky we are to have had the chance to attend medical school!

Thank you.