

# THE OATH OF HIPPOCRATES

Photo by: UT Southwestern

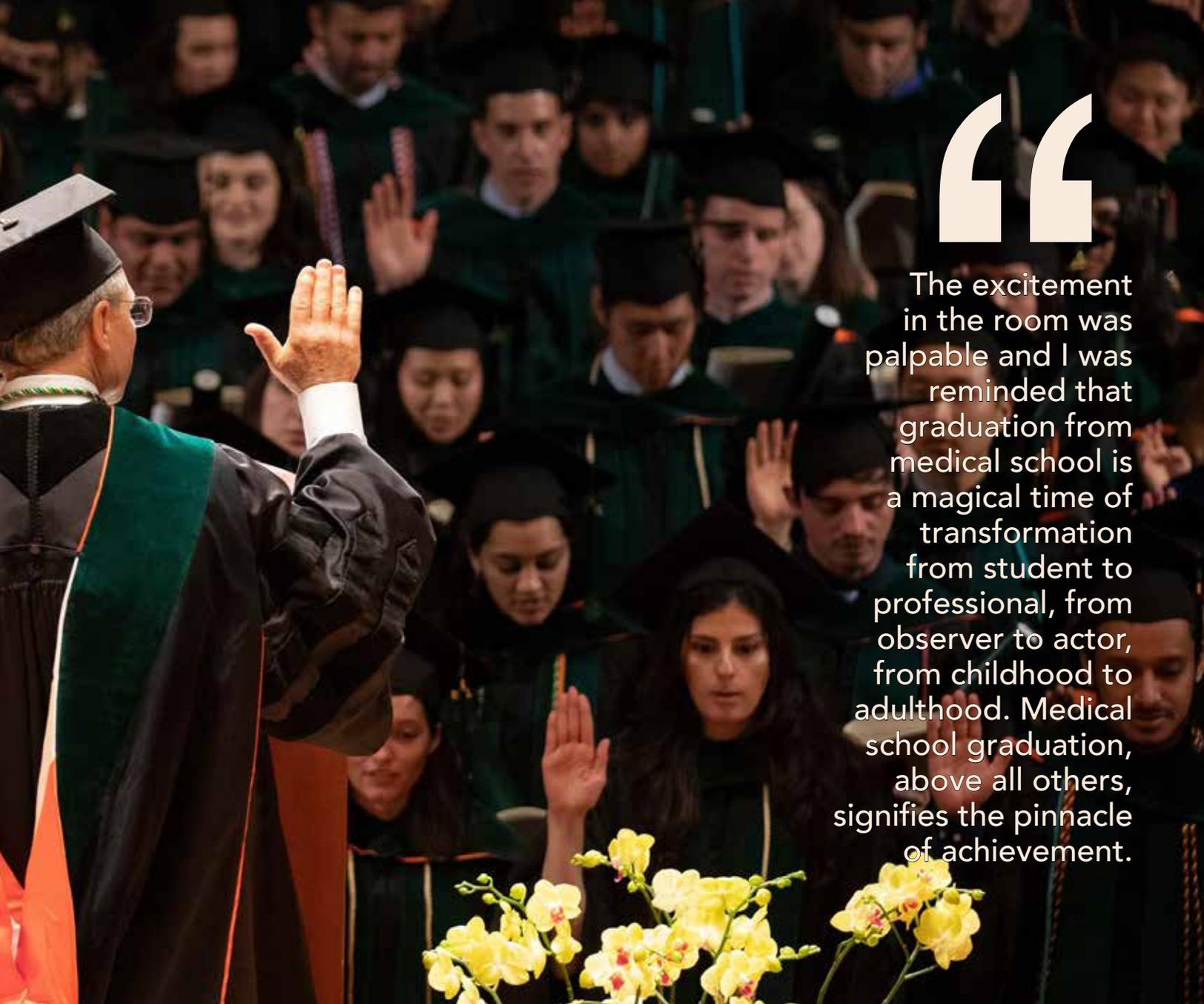


**Kevin W. Klein, MD**  
**DCMS President**

One of the oldest documents in history is the Oath of Hippocrates, which still symbolizes the sacred promise of physicians to treat the sick and suffering with the highest ethical standards. Written in Greek more than 2,500 years ago, the classical version has the physician swear by all the gods and goddesses and, although outdated, is still used by some medical schools. Most schools use some modern version called the Physician's Oath which still reflects the time-honored traditions of medicine. It is interesting to compare the UT Southwestern Physician's Oath with an English translation of the Hippocratic Oath on the next page.

A longstanding tradition at Southwestern Medical School is for the President of the school to invite the

President of the Dallas County Medical Society (DCMS) to administer the Oath as part of the graduation ceremony. In the early years of Southwestern, there is no record of a Physician's Oath being administered. Instead, the Southwestern wartime classes of 1944–1946 were given oaths of commission to the Army or Navy. As Southwestern emerged from World War II, the Physician's Oath became a graduation ceremony tradition and was usually administered by a respected faculty member. John Chapman, Assistant Dean for Medical Education, gave the oath from 1953–1970. Charles Sprague, as first President of Southwestern Medical School (1971–1986), gets credit for starting the tradition of inviting the DCMS President to give the Oath and creating this enduring tie with



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the DCMS. Two of Dr. Sprague's faculty, Gladys Fashena (1976) and Frederick Bonte (1980) were DCMS Presidents and both gave the Oath at graduation. From 1979 there has been a more or less uninterrupted custom of the DCMS President swearing in the graduating class.

Last month it was my distinct honor and privilege to be the most recent DCMS President to administer the Physician's Oath to the UT Southwestern graduates. It was truly the highlight of the year for this President. The Morton Meyerson Symphony Center was the magnificent stage for the 236 new physicians and their families. As a member of the UT Southwestern faculty, I personally had the pleasure of teaching many of these students. It

amazes me to reflect on what they have been through. It is common for me and my faculty colleagues to think, "Wow, there is no way I would get into medical school these days. These students are so well prepared, hyper-achieving and accomplished, even before they start medical school." The excitement in the room was palpable and I was reminded that graduation from medical school is a magical time of transformation from student to professional, from observer to actor, from childhood to adulthood. Medical school graduation, above all others, signifies the pinnacle of achievement.

And as I see them moving out into the world, I worry for them. As a parent of a new medical grad, it is my lot. Life will not be a bed of roses for these new grads.

The practice of medicine is changing more rapidly than ever and not always for the best. I worry about government and insurance companies negatively influencing the physician-patient relationship. I worry that most students are burdened by debt and what this will do to their lives and choices. I worry that burnout will trap more physicians despite our growing awareness and efforts to promote wellness and resilience. But I am happy for them.

And on this magical night standing on the dais, as I raised my right hand and looked deeply into their eyes, I saw no worries. As I recited that Oath once more I realized that the dream of becoming a physician, practicing medicine, healing the sick and relieving suffering is alive and well in Dallas. **DMJ**

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# THE EVOLUTION OF THE OATH

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## HIPPOCRATIC OATH - CLASSICAL VERSION



**I** swear by Apollo Physician and Asclepius and Hygieia and Panacea and all the gods and goddesses, making them my witnesses, that I will fulfill according to my ability and judgment this oath and this covenant:

To hold him who has taught me this art as equal to my parents and to live my life in partnership with him, and if he is in need of money to give him a share of mine, and to regard his offspring as equal to my brothers in male lineage and to teach them this art—if they desire to learn it—without fee and covenant; to give a share of precepts and oral instruction and all the other learning to my sons and to the sons of him who has instructed me and to pupils who have signed the covenant and have taken an oath according to the medical law, but no one else.

I will apply dietetic measures for the benefit of the sick according to my ability and judgment; I will keep them from harm and injustice.

I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody who asked for it, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect. Similarly I will not give to a woman an abortive remedy. In purity and holiness I will guard my life and my art.

I will not use the knife, not even on sufferers from stone, but will withdraw in favor of such men as are engaged in this work.

Whatever houses I may visit, I will come for the benefit of the sick, remaining free of all intentional injustice, of all mischief and in particular of sexual relations with both female and male persons, be they free or slaves.

What I may see or hear in the course of the treatment or even outside of the treatment in regard to the life of men, which on no account one must spread abroad, I will keep to myself, holding such things shameful to be spoken about.

If I fulfill this oath and do not violate it, may it be granted to me to enjoy life and art, being honored with fame among all men for all time to come; if I transgress it and swear falsely, may the opposite of all this be my lot.

Translation from Greek by Ludwig Edelstein. From *The Hippocratic Oath: Text, Translation, and Interpretation*, by Ludwig Edelstein. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1943.

## PHYSICIAN'S OATH - UT SOUTHWESTERN

**I pledge the following as an expression of the spirit in which I will strive to practice medicine:**

- *To promote health and to relieve suffering in both the living and the dying.*
- *To approach all my patients with integrity, candor, empathy, and respect.*
- *To honor the confidences entrusted in me.*
- *To be a student and teacher always, and to remain conscious of my limitations.*
- *To place the welfare of the patients above personal gain, and to protect patients from improper care.*
- *To respond always in an emergency.*
- *To improve health care for the underserved, and to work to change those conditions in society that threaten the health of the community.*
- *To withdraw from active practice when I am no longer capable of fulfilling these pledges.*
- *To keep the promise of Hippocrates: "Above all, do no harm."*

**I make these pledges solemnly, freely, and upon my honor.**