

White Coat Address by Dr. Barry Block to the NYCPM Class of '16 on September 11, 2012

President Levine. Dean Trepal, Dean Lowy, Col. Neary, members of the Board, faculty, students, families, and honored guests:

It is my great honor to address you on this momentous occasion. Forty year ago today, I stood in the old building at 53 East 124th Street as an entering freshman. Times were certainly different then. First of all, the college was a single five-story structure without the modern labs, classrooms with advanced technology, and operating rooms that you will use for the next four years. The composition of our class was 63 men and one woman.

The profession itself was different. The degree that you will receive, Doctor of Podiatric Medicine was less than a decade old. In New York, podiatrists had just received the right to prescribe for controlled substances. One-year residencies were reserved for the one-third of our class who were fortunate enough to secure them. The entity known as the American Board of Podiatric Surgery did not exist. Back then, the profession had its own set of standards which were somewhat distinct from other branches of allopathic medicine. The biggest challenge in those days was obtaining hospital privileges.

Looking back at the past four decades, it is clear that podiatric medicine and surgery have made tremendous strides. We are now a full-fledged medical specialty recognized and accepted by every other medical specialty, including orthopedic surgery, which at one time challenged our right to perform bone surgery. Obtaining hospital privileges is no longer an issue. Podiatrists are an integral part of the hospital healthcare team, particularly in areas such as diabetic wound care. Podiatrists are now even chiefs of medical and surgical staffs, as well as being hospital administrators. We have come a long way.

Looking forward, I can't even imagine the progress this profession will make over the next four decades. Based on the evolution of podiatric medicine and surgery, I do predict that by that that time, we will have reached true parity with every other medical specialty.

Thanks to the efforts of this college working closely with the New York State Podiatric Medical Association, you will practice with a scope far exceeding anything existing practitioners have.

My message to you today is to urge you to continue this great heritage which is now being passed on to you. These significant gains have been achieved through hard work, education, training, and the constant goal of providing superior care of the foot and ankle.

It is your solemn responsibility to advance this profession by devoting your career to this lofty goal. As a podiatrist, everything you do will reflect on the way we will be viewed by the general public and rest of the medical community. As an example, eleven years ago today, when this city was under attack, faculty and students, as well as NYCPM alumni were quickly on the scene to treat the feet of the brave fireman and workers who walked all day on the smoldering remains of the World Trade Center.

The way you conduct yourselves in your personal life will also reflect on this profession. Make solid ethical choices and be sure to become an active participant in your community. Lead a balanced life, combining hobbies, sports, and above all, family. Remember that learning will not end when you graduate and finish your residency. It is a lifelong endeavor.

To the parents of our new students, I share your pride in their achievement as they begin a challenging four years at NYCPM. The workload will be difficult, and they may need your support at times, but the ultimate rewards will far more than any monetary benefits that they will accrue in their careers. You simply cannot put a price on the satisfaction that comes from knowing that you saved the limb of a patient with a diabetic ulcer or that you diagnosed malignant melanoma in its early stages, and saved a patient's life.

To our new students: As I fondly look back at my years at NYCPM, I can't honestly tell you that at the time, they were always fun and enjoyable. Trust me when I say that the rigorous training you will receive is not meant to torture you, although I suspect that you will at some point disagree with me. Rather it is meant to train you to provide superior medical and surgical care of

the foot and ankle to that of any other practitioners in the world.

I was once asked by a colleague what blood type I had. My response was P+, for my passion has always been and will always be podiatry. I hope that I was able to provide you all with a small transfusion of that passion today. G-d speed! Thank you.