

UMSL COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

Ron McMullen – President, Christian Hospital

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Good afternoon! It's my honor to provide your commencement address today. The degree you have earned will be one of your greatest personal and professional assets. After all, my undergraduate psychology degree from UMSL provided the foundation that propelled me into the workforce, then into graduate school, and finally into a 38-year career in healthcare management.

More importantly, UMSL provided the opportunity to meet my wife of 42 years, who is retired from a long career in nursing. In part because of the perspective my wife has given me, I respect and admire all healthcare professionals, but hold nurses in a special place in my head and in my heart. Great nurses represent healthcare at its best; they are knowledgeable, pragmatic, and centered on patients and families. Nurses, my (virtual) hat is off to you.

My hat is also off to the business and engineering grads; sustaining great nursing practice, especially in large, complex organizations like hospitals and health systems, requires planning, prudent resource design and utilization, and skilled recruitment and deployment of talented people – it requires the execution of business principles – in other words – management. So great nurses need great managers and leaders to build and sustain the organizations in which they work.

Pay attention business and engineering school grads – every 7th job in the U.S. economy is directly or indirectly related to healthcare! There is an excellent chance that as you progress through a career in management, engineering or finance, that at least one of your jobs will be healthcare-related – probably more than one. So let me state the first half of my thesis today: Nursing grads, you will have the challenge and privilege of using your nursing skills and your compassion to work directly with community members in times of sickness, injury, and, increasingly, help to assist them and teach them ways to regain and maintain their well-being.

That high calling is rarely done alone; in most cases, it is done best and most consistently as part of a larger team that works within a larger organization. Historically, most of these organizations have been hospitals, but care teams

within large physician practices, or health insurers, or care management companies are increasingly common. Besides nurses, to meet the needs of the communities they serve over time, these complex organizations require individuals and teams trained and proficient in business principles and methods – they need managers.

So, nursing school grads, develop respect and a good working relationship with the business and engineering school types – you will need them to provide organization and resources that optimize your nursing practice.

The 2nd half of my thesis: business and engineering school grads – I've already noted that every 7th job in the U.S. economy is healthcare-related. That alone should get your attention. But let me tell you what the nursing grads already know – by and large, healthcare jobs are great jobs! Salaries and benefits are typically equivalent to like jobs in other areas – sometimes better. Here's the bonus – healthcare jobs are imbued with purpose. Even if the job at hand is analysis on the design and use of a piece of clinical equipment or developing an operating budget for a services expansion – the line of sight is short and pretty direct to making lives better – which resonates with most people. It certainly resonated with me 38 years ago and still does today. I never have to wonder why I get up in the morning; and if my enthusiasm flags occasionally, I only need to talk to some nurses and I am uplifted.

So, business and engineering school grads – there are a lot of healthcare jobs that require your skill sets and will be personally and professionally challenging on many levels. You owe it to yourself to take a look. And if you doubt me – just ask the nurses!! Develop respect and a working relationship with nurses and it will give you appreciation of a working life with innate purpose. Over the span of a life-long career – that's worth a lot!

So my basic thesis is that healthcare is 1/7th of the American economy, that it has lots of challenging jobs, many requiring clinical skills, like nursing, and many others requiring skill sets like strategic planning, engineering, and management. The list of jobs and potential careers in healthcare goes on and on and on. And while clinicians will continue to treat patients one at a time, as patients; the organization structure and financing of healthcare will increasingly be directed to groups or populations.

This population-based concept is embodied in our nation's newest and most comprehensive healthcare law, the Affordable Care Act, more generally referred to as ObamaCare. At a high level, ObamaCare lays out a 3-part challenge to those working, or intending to work, in healthcare. The so-called Triple Aim challenges me, and someday you, to:

1. Measurably improve the health of defined populations;
2. Enhance the total patient experience, including clinical quality, service quality, access, affordability, and reliability; and
3. Reduce, or at least control, the per-capita cost of care.

The Triple Aim will drive massive changes in the organization and delivery of healthcare over the next 10 years. Why do I bring these impending changes to your attention today??

Change – if you are flexible, creative, smart, and educated – is opportunity. Your degree, earned today from UMSL, signifies that you are smart and educated; you are well-prepared. Take that excellent preparation UMSL has given you, add in some flexibility in your career choices, especially early in your career; add in the spark of creativity, so you can stand out a bit from the crowd, and then take advantage of the many broad, stimulating, ever-changing, ever-growing, service-oriented, and yes, good paying careers in healthcare.

In closing, let me encourage you to be confident that UMSL has prepared you well for the next stage of your life. Your UMSL degree will send a strong signal to the community-at-large that you have the intellectual capacity, perseverance, and drive to succeed, whether you seek a further advanced degree or move directly into the workforce.

When I began my remarks, I stated that your UMSL degree would be one of your greatest personal and professional assets. That is absolutely true. Go and capitalize on that asset; you will benefit yourself and, in doing so, benefit the community around you.

Thank you and congratulations!