**Convocation address of Professor William W Pinsky, President & CEO, Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG) and Chairman, Foundation for Advancement of International Medical Education & Research (FAIMER), University of Queensland, USA,**

First of all, allow me to thank the leadership at Manipal University, especially Professor and Dean, Dr. Prabhu for this opportunity to be with all of you today. I am truly honored to be standing in front of you. It also is important for me to recognize one of the most outstanding physician educators in the world as well as an eminent Pediatric Hematology Oncology physician, Professor Raj Warrier – an alumnus from this university as well as former Vice Chancellor. I have known Raj and worked with or interacted with him in several different academic settings over too many decades to count or even to admit to. Raj, thank you for being a friend and a colleague, and for accompanying me on this visit.

I am standing in front of you – several hundred of the most important people in the world. You, the graduates of your medical school training as well as you, finishing this part of your post graduate training. You are the people with whom we are relying to improve healthcare here in India and around the world. Your country, your university and your families have invested resources, time and emotional support to assist you in reaching your dream. I am especially grateful to be with you here today, to share this graduation experience with you, and hopefully share some thoughts with you that will continue to inspire and to energize you in your careers – helping others.

Today, I am going to challenge you with what I am calling lessons. These lessons I believe are important as you begin to lay the building block for your professional career.

To begin, let me tell you a little about myself – I attended medical school in St. Louis – long before you all were born. Way back then, there was little or no talk about professionalism, communication, empathy, or altruism It was all about the science and practice of medicine. It was however, a time when medical schools were reawakening to their responsibility in serving the community. And as I will get to later, I have carried that commitment with me throughout my career. So, my first semester in medical school, and yes even then it was very competitive to gain admission, as it still is the US and India, so we students were all enthused and really hyped up to dive right into the rigorous science curriculum. However, my first semester consisted of biochemistry, anatomy as expected and much to my surprise, also Community Medicine – and Community Medicine even made up easily half of the curriculum. The reason I mention this to you, is that as part of the CM course, we were assigned to private practice community physicians, voluntary faculty, a half day a week in order to observe how they practiced in and served the community. I was randomly assigned to Dr. Jim Donohue who was a general pediatrician with an interest in Pediatric Cardiology.

Well – as they say, the rest was history. I was very impressed with Dr. Donohue as a physician, a personality, and as a mentor, since he treated me with respect and was interested in my thoughts and plans. Somehow, amidst all of the stresses in medical school, I was able to meet Dr. Donohue in the Pediatric Cardiology clinic at Cardinal Glennon Children’s hospital at least 3 times/month during my first 2 years of school. I followed him around, learned to take a BP, learned how to use my stethoscope, and learned to make funny squeaky sounds in order to distract the pediatric patients. And here I am many years later – a Board Certified Pediatric Cardiologist.

What I just described is representative of my **first lesson** for you today. Your career as a physician cannot be shaped by you alone. Seek out mentors, role models – at different times in your career, you will need and benefit from different types of mentors. After Dr. D, my next influential person was my Pediatric Cardiology Chief at Texas Children’s Hospital/Baylor in Houston, Dr. Dan McNamara. In addition to teaching me pediatric cardiology along with the other faculty, he taught me academics, leadership, and reinforced and strengthened my approach to professionalism. And we will get to the importance of professionalism in just a little bit.

**Next lesson:** Throughout most of my first and second years of medical school, a few of us in my class spent many Saturday nights in the ER at St. Louis City Hospital. Initially, as we showed up in our clean white coats unannounced and unknown to anyone, including the house staff, attending, and nurses we identified ourselves, and made our presence known. Everyone was great and appreciated our interest and enthusiasm; we were allowed to observe, and as they got to know us better, they taught us to suture, and eventually we would scour the ED looking for patients with lacerations, and would be allowed to take our time meticulously attending to various wounds. Since this relieved the house staff from this tedious work, they were very happy then to seek **us** out and call us into rooms where an “interesting” patient was being treated. This lesson is that you will get out of your continuing medical training, and your practice, only what you put into it. There is the training and education – and there is more – whether it is enhanced patient experiences as I did, or research, community service and many other opportunities. For those of you finishing your post graduate education and going into practice, remember – you are in a profession requiring lifelong learning. You have demonstrated initiative and have worked too hard to get to this point, to now sit back and to expect to be totally knowledgeable and fully equipped to do anything you in medicine. Be in charge of your future - seek out opportunities and experiences. Those of you just graduating and those continuing in post graduate training, challenge your faculty to be available in order to discuss concepts, theories, innovative ideas and to guide you as you work your way through this amazing career opportunity.

Most of you, maybe almost all of you are here today because you have a strong **pro-social** behavior index. What is prosocial behavior? It is a voluntary behavior intended to help another. It includes behaviors such as helping, sharing and/or providing comfort to others. We cannot teach this behavior. We can however, either purposely or otherwise diminish what we innately have; on the other hand through perseverance, we can strengthen our innate abilities. Medical schools and post graduate training programs can be very successful in beating down our pro social qualities. This results in a diminishing of empathy and mindfulness in particular. My **next lesson** is to exhort you to protect this attribute. If you are in medicine because your parents or other family members have “pushed” you in this direction; or because you believe it will give you status, then it may be that your prosocial proclivity is not what is needed to be a successful empathetic caregiver. Medicine is not easy, and the pathway to your degree and post graduate training is arduous – please remember, though, you are on this pathway in order to eventually heal the sick and help maintain the health in others. This needs to be done in a mindful, empathetic manner.

Tied to this is my **fourth lesson –** way back when, physicians were looked at as leaders of communities, someone to be trusted, not just in Medicine, but also in other aspects of life. This is when individuals would turn to their physician for advice – family, business, otherwise. This is the time when we had a strong **social** contract with our communities. Over time, this social contract has been eroded - for a variety of reasons – this is a subject by itself – and in any case, we, as physicians, now mostly have a **commercial contract** with our communities. Let’s get back to that social contract. Don’t you think this is a good idea? I do. I think it is very important. This is my challenge to you: You are the ones who can move us in that direction. You are the next generation. You are the ones that still have that strong pro-social index and are not yet jaded by the commercial aspects of medicine. Everything we do should be around how we serve our communities.

My **fifth lesson** concerns **Professionalism –** professionalism can be defined or characterized in many ways. This lesson could be the most important of all I am presenting to you today. I will start by mentioning some aspects that can be important, but do not necessarily define it – this includes dressing smartly for work, or simply doing a good job. Obviously dressing appropriately and doing your job well count for something – more of what I am talking about includes:

* Conduct, aims, and qualities that define your work
* And having that specialized knowledge that you acquire during medical school, residency, fellowship and lifelong learning

This is all reinforced by some very special and important attributes. Let’s start with:

* **Specialized knowledge** combined with skill – and the commitment to continue to improve this knowledge and skill – being thoughtful and masterful. Your knowledge curve will increase exponentially as you have traversed through medical school, and again through your GME training, moving from a novice to near mastery; mastery will come with more experience. Next:
* **Competency –** not just getting the job done; being reliable; finding solutions. Next:
* **Honesty/Integrity –** keep your word; maintain your integrity; **NEVER** compromise your values -> let me say this again, **NEVER** compromise your values; always doing the right thing -> and with all of this, please remain **humble.** Hold yourself **accountable** for your behavior.

In Medicine we have something special, something precious. It is called self-regulation. In addition to showing respect for patients and coworkers, this has a lot to do with the quality of medicine, and assuring the public we are only allowing the most competent people to deliver their healthcare. Accreditation of medical schools and the licensing of physicians are important aspects of assuring our communities they are receiving the best possible care.

Building on what I just discussed, I am repeating the special attributes:

* Having specialized knowledge along with skill
* Exhibiting Competency
* Always demonstrating and holding true to Honesty and Integrity
* Showing respect for your patients, your coworkers and yes, even yourself
* Always being accountable for your behavior
* Self-regulate your behavior and interpersonal interaction
* And maintain the image your patients and coworkers expect

Your acceptance today, of your medical degree and your certificates of post graduate training, establishes your commitment to uphold and demonstrate the behavior inherent in the attributes presented. As you learned the Krebs Cycle, the Starling curve and mechanism, and other seemingly obscure basic science precepts, you may have wondered, why do I need this “useless” information, remember, it is all about creating that special competency – one of the building blocks of your professionalism structure. This is a serious business, and should be treated as such.

Take the time to expand your scientific and behavioral knowledge as you further your education and as you practice. Experience all you can experience. Put yourself even in uncomfortable situations as you seek to expose yourself to as much as possible. As busy as you will feel you are, I guarantee you that this is the time to explore. The farther you get into your career, especially further specialty training, you will be on a treadmill for another 35 years. So I always counsel medical students and young doctors that yes this is hard work getting through school – and you can enjoy it, because there is so much to learn. And don’t forget, please maintain that strong pro-social index.

It is probably difficult for you to see this at this moment in your life – and I am referring to your constructing your legacy and your meaning. I am in the last laps of my career, and as I look back, I have been fortunate to have treated and affected the lives of countless children through my interventional pediatric cardiology days; through my leadership roles in leading large academic pediatric cardiology programs; through training the next generation of cardiologists; through my leadership of medical schools, being a hospital CEO, a managed care executive, and now leading and transforming the organization that is responsible for assuring the public that IMGs allowed to come into the US are qualified to be here. In fact we also do this for 18 other countries, as well. Work hard to establish a legacy you are proud of – make a difference!

There is something else that is important and you can never forget – your families and support structure. How many parents and/or grandparents and or aunts and uncles are here today celebrating with their children? Please stand and remain standing; how many siblings? How many significant others? Any others who have not fit into these categories? I want the students to all applaud these people for their continuing support and encouragement.

Please be seated.

Finally, I once again congratulate the students for their ambition and success; I look forward to welcoming you fully into our profession in a few years.

Best of luck in your future!