

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY MR. KOJO ADDAE MENSAH, GUEST SPEAKER AT  
THE COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES CONGREGATION HELD ON  
SATURDAY, JULY 25, 2015 IN THE GREAT HALL AT 9:00AM**

The Chairman and Members of the University Council,

The Vice-Chancellor,

Pro Vice-Chancellors,

Members and Chairman of the College Advisory Board,

Members of Convocation,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Nii Mei Naa Mei,

Invited Guests,

Members of the Press,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I deem it a great honour to be invited to deliver the keynote address on the occasion of the graduation ceremony of the College of Health Sciences Class of 2015.

For these men and women, today marks the end of one chapter in their lives. I will entreat them to enjoy the moment, celebrate it and make merry for tomorrow marks the beginning of another stage in their lives. Today also offers an opportunity for me to reflect on my own experiences since my graduation, and the road I have traversed since then, to my present station in life and service. As with all young leaders of my class and station in life, it is a divine purpose, the call to duty to share ideas with, and inspire the up-and-coming generation, in whichever way we can and particularly at a time like this. It is against this background that I consider as important, this present opportunity to share a few words of inspiration with our graduands on this very special day.

Before I proceed, I would like to congratulate our dear graduands for their hard work, commitment, and perseverance. It is these attributes, and many more, that have brought them this far. You are a privileged group indeed - as the case has always been, year-in-and year-out- because you represent a much smaller proportion of persons who applied for, were ready and qualified to be trained, but could not obtain admission because of limited space. You have come a mighty long way! As the chosen few who have faithfully and successfully braced yourselves to the rigorous training to which your various programmes subjected you to, you have enabled us to place an additional tag on you as being among the best of whom we can boast. It sets you apart as prospective, responsible future leaders of this country, from whom much will be expected. Do not disappoint us.

Not only do I congratulate you for how far you have made it, but even more importantly I also congratulate and thank all parents and guardians, as well as the academic and administrative staff of the University, who by their support and various pieces of contribution have made our dream, of continually producing additional health professionals for the country, a reality. My prayer is that we will continue in the endeavor of supporting the development of higher education in this and any other way for now, and the future.

A little over two decades ago, I sat out there in the quadrangle to listen to the guest speaker on the day of my graduation, I can't remember what was said and so I will not fault you if you also don't remember what I say here today but it will be great if you took something away with you for the life that lays ahead.

Advisedly, therefore, you must equally well reflect on, and see this day as a time to do some very serious thinking, especially about what impact you can make on society and humanity, and how you expect to make that impact having been given so much via your training, that others did not receive. You must ask yourself: what degree and scope of impact can I possibly make for country, world, family and self? To what degree will the world itself permit or obstruct me from fulfilling my dreams? How might I, for that matter, rise above the challenges that might stand in my way as I aspire to serve? It is in wanting to have you position yourselves to ask and find answers to pertinent questions, as you should be asking today, that I seek to briefly give you these words of encouragement.

I would have you think, first of all, about your call to service. The true value of your certificates lie in what you do with the knowledge, skills, and expertise you have acquired. That value can only be quantified fully with time as you apply your knowledge and expertise in service. 'Service' then, should be our watch word to guide us to do our best for humanity. Now as you serve and strive to achieve, you need not allow yourselves to be intimidated by challenges, whether in your personal lives or at the work place.

Paulo Coelho the Brazilian novelist encouragingly points out succinctly in one of his novels, The Devil and Miss Prym: "***When we least expect it, life sets us a challenge to test our courage and willingness to change. At such a moment there is no point in pretending that nothing has happened or saying that we are not yet ready. The challenge will not wait. Life does not look back. A week is more than enough time for us to decide whether or not to accept our destiny***". Courage and resilience, not fear, are what we need when things do not go well with us. Develop an active, problem-solving approach to life. Persons who are resilient do not give up on themselves. Instead they get busy to find another way to solve their problems, and would often make it a point to involve others in the solution process. They may in some cases make an effort to develop their own character and skills, especially if poor self-esteem is the matter at stake. You must build and maintain a network of caring people, which must include others older and wiser than yourself. Stay connected with the people you meet, and be on both the giving and receiving ends of relationships. We may indeed also see challenges in life as opportunities for growth, in that in dealing with the problem in the correct manner, we may take ourselves out of our comfort zone

and grow as individuals, while learning from our mistakes. Against this background we must be grateful- even for the challenges that come our way.

Now to something more related to my day job. I entreat you not to waste your resources such as time, energy or finances, in both your personal lives and your workplaces. The laws of economics enjoins us to understand that resources are far fewer at any point in time in our lives than we will ever need. Whether as a nation, family or as individuals, no one's needs are ever fully met in life. We must therefore always cherish what nature has endowed us with. Learn to put to maximum use the limited resources placed at our disposal. Develop a positive attitude towards money, and avoid being greedy for it. According to the late American author and poet, Maya Angelou, ***"You can only become truly accomplished at something you love. Don't make money your goal. Instead pursue the things you love doing, and then do them so well that people can't take their eyes off you"***. Create rather than waste wealth. Pay heed to Miguel De Cervantes, the 18 and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Spanish novelist and poet, in his advice ***"Never to stand begging for that which you have power to earn"***

This admonition calls for extreme self-discipline when it comes to managing financial resources. Each of us has the capacity to earn money and to manage what we earn by making appropriate financial investments. There is a difference between saving and Investing and I will encourage all of you to invest. Right from today, you need to start investing in your retirement. It is sad to note that most Ghanaians start thinking of retirement at the age of 55 when actually you should all start thinking about it right from the day you start earning an income. My advice is therefore, to start investing early and to control your spending. No amount is too small to start with. The key is to be consistent. While you have all the opportunity, find time to consult an investment advisor, before it's too late.

Early this year, I had the privilege of being appointed to the advisory board of the college of health sciences and in the few months that I have been there, I have been shocked at the kind of challenges facing health education in Ghana. We are reliably informed that the doctor-to-patient ratio in Ghana today is 1:15,250; that of nurses is 1:1,251, and pharmacists, 1:14,528, and worst of all dentists 1: 104,000. These ratios, compared to the WHO recommended ratios, are much too high. Something has to really be done about the situation and I will use this opportunity to call on my colleagues in corporate Ghana to take a much keener interest in supporting health education in Ghana. There is so much we can do for the College of Health Sciences that will ultimately benefit the economy. I doff my hat to faculty members who continuously surmount enormous challenges to train our health professionals.

Going by the WHO definition of health: **"health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity"**. Since society is made up of the political, legal, cultural and the environmental framework, our health is affected by all the rules, ideas, norms, guidelines, information and the environments we encounter every day<sup>1</sup>. What this should mean to us, not only as health professionals, but as individual members of the society, is that everything that makes up our community, society, and culture,

has an impact on our health. Our habitats, experiences, and the feedback we receive about who we are as individuals, can all affect our physical and mental well-being.

Finally to the graduands, challenge yourself, perhaps after you have gained significant experience in your medical practice, to do a little service to the economy of our dear country, by assessing how entrepreneurial you can be in the non-formal sector, while improving the health status of our people. Think about contributions being made by the likes of Lister Hospital, FOCUS Hospital, the Lighthouse Mission Hospital, the Nyaho Medical Centre, the Peace and Love Hospital and Breast Care International, to name just a few. Also think about the possibility of collaboration in the area of medical training, through which several accredited private medical training institutions are being established. The more private health institutions that can be set up in the country with your involvement, the more competitive the healthcare industry will become, while benefitting the well-being of the citizenry of this country. Think about these things as you seek to explore your horizon for a brighter, healthier, future for Ghana.

Before I take my seat, let me leave you with something my good friend Ace said in this very hall in November 2013

When others sit, you must stand

When others stand, you must stand out

When others stand out, you must be outstanding

And, when they become outstanding, you must become the standard

I wish you all well, and may God bless us all. Thank you.