

Address to the St. Joseph Medical School Graduating Class July 4, 2016

Your Excellences, esteemed guests, members of the USJ Administration and Board of Trustees; friends, parents and families of our outstanding students, the superb faculty and staff of this University, and yes, exceptional graduates from the USJ Medical School Class of 2016! I am honored to greet you and thank you for inviting me to be here on this very special evening.

أصحاب المعالي والسعادة والسيادة، الضيوف الكرام، حضرات أعضاء مجلس الأمناء الأجلاء، أهالي وعائلات الطلاب المميزين، أعضاء الهيئة التعليمية والإدارية الرائعين، ونعم، خريجي ال USJ الرائعين والإستثنائيين للعام 2016! إنه لشرف لي أن أحييكم أحر تحية وأشكركم على دعوتكم الى هذه الأمسية الرائعة.

(French) Excellences, invités distingués, membres du conseil d'administration, très chers parents et familles de les remarquables étudiants, les exceptionnels diplômés de la promotion médicale de USJ de l'année 2016, sans oublier évidemment le unique corps professoral et administratif.

Chers tous, j'ai l'honneur de vous accueillir à cette soirée qui s'annonce spéciale.

Dear future colleagues and members of the University St. Joseph Class of 2016, it is my pleasure and my privilege to be with you this evening. You are here to celebrate a major accomplishment in this transformative journey that you have embarked upon, one that has shaped, inspired, and changed every one of you here today. You are the beneficiaries of support from your parents, family, and friends, and of inspiration from the variety of experiences and people that you have encountered in your lives. The importance of becoming a lifelong student of medicine cannot be overstated. The best way to know the truth and to serve your patients is to engage in research; one of the fundamental missions and duties of the great research universities such as USJ. William Osler, a founder of modern American medical education, was known to have remarked: "It astonishes me how many physicians practice medicine without reading. What does not surprise me in the least is how poorly they do so!"

The finest physician scientists and clinical scientific investigators exemplify many of the essential qualities needed for excellence in this matchless field of medicine, and they gradually learn and integrate the vast potential for meaningful servant-leadership. Each of us is faced with the choice of many professions. You have chosen one fraught with challenges, an artful science that is perpetually evolving. You will come to see why medicine is not only any profession, but a calling like no other. It will present to you a series of opportunities and challenges unlike those in any other profession, some that you will cherish and others that you may dread. But you must face all of them head on.

We have all taken different paths to arrive here today. To mark this great occasion, I have been asked to recollect some aspects from my personal scientific journey. In 1982, I left Lebanon and AUB, and moved to New Haven for what I thought would be one year abroad at Yale University before I returned to the country of my origin. But that return never took place until 2015, when after 33 years in the US, I became AUB's 16th President. As the great line by the poet Al-Mutanabbi goes,

(مَا كُلُّ مَا يَتَمَنَّى الْمَرْءُ يُدْرِكُهُ)
تجري الرياح بما لا تشتهي السفن

(Ma kullu maa yatamanna l-mar'u yudrikuhu)
Tajri r-riyyaHu bima laa tashtahi s-sufunu

“(As) the winds blow in directions the ships may not desire, (so man will not attain everything he covets.)

So I embraced Yale, particularly the humanities and the natural sciences. I was fortunate to attend one of the oldest and finest medical schools in America, and equally fortunate that it was in New York, the Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons. There, in the midst of many life-altering experiences, I met my inspiring and remarkable wife, who was in the process of studying for her Masters and later PhD in Nutrition. Her qualities of intelligence, temperance, generosity, beauty and good judgment were for me unmatched, and have profoundly influenced me in my life and in my work.

It was at Columbia that I met and apprenticed under the late I. Bernard Weinstein, then the Cancer Center Director at Columbia University. He was a man of great wisdom, humor, and natural kindness. He was also one of the most generous scientists I had the great fortune to be associated with. During my training as a house officer at the Boston City Hospital I discovered in the midst of the darkest days of the AIDS epidemic two fundamental truths: that the bedside appealed to me more than the bench, and that the only path forward for patients stricken with intractable diseases such as AIDS and Cancer was through research. When I informed Bernie Weinstein of my stunning realization—stunning to me, at least, if not to my parents—he simply said to me: “Always follow your heart.”

Another influential mentor was the great Korean-American cancer clinical trialist, Waun Ki Hong, with whom I worked while at the MD Anderson Cancer Center. Bernie Weinstein, Ki Hong, my wife Lamya, my parents, my brother and my children have all been the great positive influences in my life, and it was largely due to their guidance, unvarnished belief and constant support that I am where I am today.

You are graduating today from a great medical school, as distinguished and vital to Lebanon as AUB, and as my own alma mater, Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons is to the United States of America. Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth was founded in 1875 by the Jesuit brethren. It ranks as one of the two finest universities in Lebanon, and among the top schools of higher education in the entire Middle East. An article in Al-Nahar 18 months ago attributes 80% of cultural, literary and scientific innovation in Lebanon to the presence of these two great schools, AUB and USJ. USJ's alumni include numerous Lebanese presidents, ministers, scholars, intellectuals, clerics and thought leaders. As Lebanon's oldest and main Francophone university, it has promoted Lebanese and French culture as well as in the case of this great school, the art of healing. My own association with the medical school dates back almost forty years, to the deep and binding friendship between my father, the late Raja N. Khuri, the first Arab and Lebanese Dean of AUB's Medical School with the equally unique Dr. Najib Taleb, Dean of USJ's School of Medicine. The two conspired and collaborated to make the ancient bonds of rivalry between these two great schools disappear, as Lebanon faced a relentless

war where the need for maturity and collaboration between its two finest academic and particularly medical institutions was never higher. It was thus a great coincidence but utterly fitting that one of the first three individuals that I would award honorary degrees to as the first Lebanese President of AUB was that same Najib Taleb's son, the original and creative Nassim Taleb, whose *Incerto* quartet, including the books *Black Swan* and *Antifragile*, has revolutionized our thinking of outlier phenomena and how to evaluate them. Another was the great Lebanese filmmaker, actress and writer, Nadine Labaki, herself a graduate of USJ. This was finally AUB, your peer and sister school's, recognition of the enduring influence of USJ on Lebanese creative thought, perhaps belated recognition but no less sincere for that fact.

It is imperative that the burgeoning friendship between the Presidents of AUB and USJ in this era translates into a lasting collaboration in Lebanese intellectual and educational leadership. It must grow and extend and become more than mere personal trust into lasting impactful collaborations, and a leadership role for the great universities of Lebanon in the growth of a Lebanese and Arab intellectual and economic renaissance. Your generation is capable of blazing the trail for a new Lebanon, more vibrant, more inclusive, more innovative. It is our responsibility and your responsibility, to be more than we are, and rather all that we can be. The very accomplished French geneticist, popularizer of science, essayist and humanist who was well known for defending ideas related to science, and championing the underprivileged and the environment, Albert Jacquard, once said in his book "l'Abécédaire de l'ambiguïté", published in 1989: "La fonction première d'une société est d'éduquer, c'est-à-dire de faire prendre conscience à chacun qu'il peut se choisir un destin et s'efforcer de le réaliser.[...] Il ne s'agit pas de fabriquer des hommes tous conformes à un modèle, ayant tous appris les mêmes réponses, mais des personnes capables de formuler de nouvelles questions".

So what wisdom can I impart to you on your own path towards the magnificent medical profession? I have long held to the belief that incentivizing talented and dedicated individuals to develop new knowledge, to engage in the discovery of the truth through science, is the key to progress not only in biomedical research, but in human empathy. I am convinced that with the right motivation, people can work wonders for the greater good, as enshrined in the AUB motto—"That they may have life and have it more abundantly." Those for whom we seek to provide a more abundant life include our patients. One thing you learn from taking care of cancer patients is that your worst day is almost always better than your patient's best day. Keep that in mind the next time you are suffering the pain of some form of rejection or disappointment, and have to talk to and care for someone with a life-altering or life-ending illness.

And so we come to the mystery and power of medicine. In medicine, you will do great good at times, but failure will also occasionally find you. You will experience great frustration as those whom you labor to heal suffer nonetheless. You will learn anew, as many of us have, the clinical insights that you acquire not only with knowledge and experience, but in the very fabric of life. These insights are immersed in fascinating new data about the DNA, RNA and proteins that determine the factors behind an individual's illness and its ultimate outcome. All of these will give you only partial answers, and you will learn to accept that for all our enhanced knowledge, all our faith, or lack thereof, in science, God, technology or whatever it is we hold

dearest to our hearts, medicine remains an art. It is an art that is predicated on one's sense of responsibility to others, and the great privilege of caring for those less fortunate than ourselves.

Art and science, history and roadmap, medicine provides a career in which every day is worthwhile; every challenge is meaningful; every task important; and every lesson invaluable. If a life as a perennial student of the biological and social sciences appeals to you, you have chosen well. You never stop learning in medicine. The lessons you learn and those that you teach acquire great significance. Members of the USJ Medical Class of 2016, today we celebrate your accomplishments. We celebrate the fact that you have navigated soundly, with skill, accomplishment and judgment, a voyage deep into the science, magic, and mystery of medicine. You join in your pursuit of the truth with generations of great scholars and scientists, humanists and heroes. You graduate today not only with brilliant academic accomplishments, but with the innate spirit of servant-leadership you have demonstrated when you applied for this most demanding, and ultimately most inspiring of professions. My charge to you is to enjoy the voyage. It is a long one, but I can think of none more challenging, more meaningful, or more rewarding. Some of you will discover and receive powerful new scientific knowledge, but all of you will heal, and be yourselves healed by the journey. Congratulations and best wishes moving ever forward into the heart of this most noble and magnificent calling!