Chancellor Wilson, Dean Fiser, Distinguished faculty, fellow physicians, guests, I want to welcome and congratulate the students and especially their families who supported and helped these students for so many years in obtaining their goal of entering medical school.

I am honored to be given the opportunity to give this lecture at such an important ceremony.

You are taught never to apologize in your lecture, but please excuse me if my voice becomes weak. I have just completed a course of treatment that included surgery, chemotherapy and radiation. I can honestly tell you that I love being a physician, but it really stinks being a patient. My care at UAMS has been outstanding, and I can never thank my caregivers enough for their excellent care. However, we can always learn from our patients. So I would like to share with you an observation and something to think about. Through out the 4 months of treatment I could not count how many times a care giver asked me how I was doing; however, I can count on one hand how many times that my care giver actually paused to listen to my response before beginning with other questions or some procedure or exam. I can assure you that this experience will make me a better physician or at least has taught me sometimes listening is more important than completing my long list of duties.

The white coat ceremony was originated by Dr Arnold Gold in 1993 and I have the pleasure and honor to acknowledge that Dr Gold was my mentor in pediatric neurology when I was a resident.
at Columbia University in the early 80’s. As I remember Dr Gold was a soft spoken, distinguished looking man who was highly respected both by his colleagues as well as his patients. As a matter of fact, I have never seen such a sincere love from patients for a physician. The white coat ceremony is a true embodiment of how Dr Gold practiced medicine and served as an outstanding educator.

It was just last year that I sat in the audience where you are and had the honor of watching my oldest son take this oath and don his white coat as a first year medical student at UAMS. A year later, I learned a lot about our medical school. After a recent discussion and interaction with my son, I learned something very important about our medical school. That is that UAMS is the finest medical school in America. Because after just one year of medical school, my son already knows more about medicine than I do after 4 years of medical school, residency, 2 fellowships, and 20 years of practicing and teaching medicine. This is surely an amazing medical school to teach him so much in such a short time. But, I still love him and I am proud of him.

To the students tonight: the oath you are taking is the first step on a journey; you are pledging in a statement of intent to ethical and honorable behavior as a student, not as a physician, this will come as your journey continues.

This oath reminds me of a famous poem by Oyekake Satty Joshua entitled “Faithfulness”

A character of honesty  
and conduct of integrity  
a journey of fidelity  
a life of authenticity  
Before the face of God  
In public and private  
In labor and leisure.

Thus, this is an oath not only applying to our profession but our life. It is the beginning of a process of professional development that will never stop throughout your career.

In the oath you will be asked to commit to 6 specific actions, I would like to discuss each briefly.

First of these is Loyalty: Loyalty to profession: this is important because it is asking you to commit yourself to something larger than yourself. Just as each of the faculty today are here to invite you to join us in a ritual of initiation into a world of thinking, and learning about the practice of medicine. We pledge to be loyal to you as our students as you pledge to our profession.

Respect: Respect for well being and humanity: In expressing respect you have to allow yourself to place others above yourself. For we will never respect others if we consider ourselves superior to them. Dr Gold always had a way to help us remember these both in the way he acted and in little reminders he would give us. One I remember vividly was he would at the beginning of a rotation gather all the students, residents and neurology fellows into one of the lecture halls. He would stand before us with a slide projector loaded with slides of pictures of patients with
different neurologic lesions. He would quickly move from slide to slide and it became a
competition for someone to be the first to identify the neurologic lesions correctly. Of course the
fellows and senior residents would anxiously wait for the next slide to drop and appear on the
screen so they could be first with the diagnosis. He would move from slide to slide listening
closely to the responses and acknowledge the person with the correct answer. One slide I
remember vividly was of a newborn baby sitting propped up in what appeared to be a tub with
her left arm contracted and right arm extended and what appeared to be contorted face which
almost looked like a laugh. As it appeared you would hear the responses, Erbs palsy, no a lesion
involving both the facial nerve and brachial plexus. Dr Gold would listen patiently and then say
WRONG it is a picture of my granddaughter taking her first bath. Reminding us that we may not
be as smart as we thought we were.

Aid: Aiding general welfare of the community, again this is a commitment of something greater
than ourselves. This reminds me of a time when I was a resident and I was in Dr. Gold’s office
trying to figure out a complex neurologic patient. Of course Dr. Gold was doing more listening
than talking as he was allowing me to find my way through the signs and symptoms to identify
the location of the neurologic lesion. There was a knock and an elderly couple entered carrying
two large suitcases. Dr. Gold warmly greeted them and they opened the suitcases to reveal they
were filled with prescription drugs. Dr. Gold looked at me with a smile and said these are
seizure medications not available in the US yet, but I have used them in Europe and my travels
and they work and I cannot deny my patients.

Cooperation: Spirit of cooperation this is probably one of the more difficult components in a
profession made up of over achievers with type A personalities it will be a life long goal not to
compete but to cooperate and put the goal of learning above competition. If you help your
fellow student to learn a difficult concept, you are helping that person learn what will help them
some day care for a patient and possibly save a life.

Resist: Resist considerations of nationality, politics, and prejudice or material advancement.
However, this does not mean you are to abandon your beliefs. It is essential that you must be
consistent with your personal ethic, your cultural and religious beliefs, for by bringing these into
your career and practice of medicine, you will make it a more diverse and rich in traditions and
beliefs that your patients will appreciate, for it will make you a unique sincere individual that
your patient will recognize.

Practice with conscience and dignity. Remember this is not only public but private it is for you
at all times to practice and behave as if you are being driven by a belief larger than yourself and
that everything you say and do will reflect on who you are and what you believe.

In Conclusion: I ask you today as you don your white coat for the first time, you take a second
to think about that first step you take after placing on your white coat and realize that this is the
first step on a journey that will be exciting, frustrating, but will be the most fantastic journey you
will ever take, and I speaking for all the faculty, welcome you on this journey.

May God Bless you and your future, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you tonight.