



They cared for veterans, and underserved patients from Orlando to the Dominican Republic. One donated a piano to Nemours Children’s Hospital to give sick children and their families the healing aspects of music. Another housed 15 children in crisis – while attending medical school. These 94 UCF medical students – including five military officers – graduated and became Physician Knights May 20 after a four-year med school journey dedicated to caring for others.

The Class of 2016 commencement brings to 263 the number of physicians who have graduated from UCF’s young medical school.

In her commencement remarks, Dr. Deborah German, vice president for health affairs and founding dean of the College of Medicine, remarked on the diverse talents in the class. “Not long ago, on your first day of medical school, we welcomed you to a new adventure,” she said. “You came to us as artists and scientists, community volunteers, performers, athletes, researchers. Over the years we have seen you grow into talented, committed physicians.

President John C. Hitt remarked how the Class of 2016 “took a chance on UCF,” enrolling before the medical school received full accreditation. He noted how their choice of medical school has given them considerable advantages. “You earned an exceptional education from an innovative medical college that is rapidly gaining national recognition,” he said. “You begin your careers at top hospitals in Orlando, in Florida, and in the nation in specialties ranging from primary care to anesthesiology and neurosurgery. And you are forever linked to a dynamic Medical City that inspires hope and optimism throughout America for incomparable clinical care and new medical solutions.”

Service to others was a theme of the class and its commencement celebration. The students’ chosen faculty speaker was Dr. Judy Simms-Cendan, associate professor of obstetrics and

gynecology, who leads international experiences at the College of Medicine. She also leads yearly medical mission trips to the Dominican Republic and oversees the student-run free KNIGHTS Clinic at Orlando's Grace Medical Home. She talked to graduates about the privilege of earning an M.D. degree and urged them to use that achievement to care for and engage with others, especially those in need. "The fulfillment from caring for others, especially those with few resources and support, is magic," she said. "Embrace and celebrate that gift... Do not put off for the future what you can do in the present; add the patient that calls late in the afternoon, finish your notes, then volunteer at the free clinic, or be an advocate for the underserved."

Elissa Engel came to medical school after working as a nurse and is now going into a pediatric residency at University of South Florida. She was a leader at KNIGHTS and cared for people in remote villages of the Dominican Republic. She talked about the lifetime friendships and mentors she had made at UCF. "Dr. Simms-Cendan is just such a role model for me as far as how I want to live my personal and professional life," she said.



Five of the new graduates are military officers, who are part of the military's Health Professions Scholarship program. After getting their diplomas, they received promotions in rank. They took the military oath from Dr. Richard Pepler, associate dean for faculty and academic affairs and a 35-year veteran of the U.S. Army Reserve. As they stood in attention on the main commencement stage, the officers – representing the U.S. Army, Navy and Air Force – received a standing ovation from the crowd of almost 1,000.

Ashley Humphries is one of those officers, the latest in a long family history of Air Force service. She said her military training helped her through medical school because "it teaches you about discipline" and she's delighted she can combine a passion for medicine that began in pre-school with service to her country. Her advice to future medical students. "Be like the little engine that could. Just keep chugging."

For many students, graduation was about love and family. John and Page Axley were married a few weeks ago and now go onto residencies at the University of Alabama Birmingham. As they walked down the hall at the Venue with their diplomas under their arms, the two held hands and giddily addressed each other as "Doctor" for the first time.

Christin Giordano, who goes onto residency at Vanderbilt, said she was overwhelmed, excited and sad to leave classmates and her medical school. "I lost my dad the first year of medical school and my classmates have gotten me through all that," she said. "Obviously we're missing

him here today but I know he'd be proud of me. It's just been very overwhelming, a really joyous occasion.”

Chris Jacobs called graduation “an amazing time.” He's going into surgery, something he's dreamed about since middle school. “My son, Jack was born four months ago,” Jacobs said, “and it's so important for him to be here today.”



Class speaker Farah Dosani reflected on how the Class of 2016 had been a cast of characters, and that their rich diversity had allowed them to serve the world in special ways. She ended her speech with a paraphrased Apple commercial dedicated to her classmates:

“Here's to you – the crazy ones. The Mother Teresa's, the curers of disease, the reformers of healthcare. The classmates who went to a medical school in its beginnings. Some may see it as a risk, but we saw it as an opportunity. You challenge conformity. You push possibilities forward. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change things, are the ones who do.”

<https://med.ucf.edu/news/2016/05/ucf-graduates-94-new-physician-knights/>