

MEDICAL SCHOOL HOTLINE

Governor Ige's Remarks — John A. Burns School of Medicine University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Convocation Ceremony Keynote Address, Sunday, May 12, 2019

David Y. Ige, Governor of the State of Hawai'i

In 1993, the Medical School Hotline was founded by Satoru Izutsu PhD (former vice-dean UH JABSOM), it is a monthly column from the University of Hawai'i John A. Burns School of Medicine and is edited by Kathleen Kihmm Connolly PhD; HJH&SW Contributing Editor.

Dean Hedges, Regent Portnoy, distinguished faculty, parents, families, friends, and the John A. Burns School of Medicine Class of 2019.

Good morning and *Aloha!*

Congratulations on your incredible achievement — and thank you for allowing me the honor of being a part of your special day.

We are here to celebrate and honor YOU this morning, for surviving this long and arduous journey. Congratulations Class of 2019.

Please take a moment to remember and thank those who have supported and inspired you along the way.

Perhaps it was a teacher who sparked your interest in the sciences, a fellow student who joined you in letting off some steam in your time of stress and anxiety, or a classmate who pulled all-nighters with you...

And most importantly — your parents, grandparents, *tutus* (grandmothers), aunties, uncles, *hanai* (adopted) families — who may have guided you, supported you, rooted for you and sacrificed... so that you could realize your dreams.

They too deserve to be acknowledged today.

You may be wondering, as I have — why an engineer by profession, and the governor of the State of Hawai'i — has been invited to speak to DOCTORS at the convocation for the John A. Burns School of Medicine? I have to admit, it's pretty intimidating to see the list of previous keynote speakers at convocation, but here's my story.

My grandparents, the *Issei* (first generation Japanese immigrants), immigrated to Hawai'i from Japan and Okinawa more than 100 years ago in search of a better life and future for their family.

They came to work on the plantations in Hawai'i. Weeding, cutting, and hauling sugarcane by hand is back-breaking work, for just pennies a day.

My mother, Edna Tsurue Miota, grew up on Kahuku Plantation, on the North shore of O'ahu. Her formal education in the public schools ended in the 8th grade.

My mother's dream was to become a nurse...and it became very clear that would not be possible here in Hawai'i.

A doctor at Kahuku Hospital, Dr. Rothwell, learned of my mother's dream, and took action to help make her dream come true. He contacted his friend, Dr. Totwell, in Denver and he agreed to assist.

At age 15, my mother left Hawai'i and traveled alone by steamship to the mainland. She was *hanai'd* by Dr. Totwell and lived with his family for several years, and graduated from East High School in Denver and St. Luke's School of Nursing before returning to Hawai'i.

Doctors are compassionate people who are committed to improving people's lives — and they do make dreams come true.

Life was harsh on the plantation, with few options. My father, Tokio Ige, and father-in-law, Sakuji Amano, both grew up on Ewa plantation. Their formal education was completed when they graduated from Ewa Elementary as 8th graders. They eventually began work on the plantation as a steel worker and crane operator.

On the morning of December 7, 1941, when the bombs fell on Pearl Harbor, their lives changed forever.

More than 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry were stripped of their Constitutional rights and relocated to internment camps.

At first, the war department classified the *Nisei*, (American born children of Japanese immigrants) as 4C, “enemy aliens” unfit for service. The *Nisei* had learned one of the most important values, “*on*”, a debt of gratitude in the deepest sense, an obligation to be grateful to the land of their birth, America. They were eager to prove their loyalty.

My father and father-in-law both volunteered to become members of the 100th Infantry Battalion of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team during World War II. Their service was legendary – the most decorated battalion for its size and length of service in US history.

After the war, the *Nisei* soldiers returned to Hawai‘i and were subjected to much of the same prejudice and discrimination they had endured before the war. But they had been changed. After proving their loyalty to America, they were committed to the vision of the Founding Fathers of this great nation, to create “A More Perfect Union,” committed to the cause of equal rights and equal opportunity for all of the residents of Hawai‘i.

The *Nisei* veterans laid down their arms and began building for the future.

They worked to elect John A. Burns as Governor in 1962. Governor Burns realized that the only way to ensure equal opportunity for all, was for Hawai‘i to have a world class university and its own medical school. This school was started in 1965.

The John A. Burns School of Medicine has become one of the best in the country in Primary Care as ranked by *US News and World Report*. Its student body is amongst the most diverse in America, giving opportunities to all ethnic groups in Hawai‘i. About half of all practicing doctors in Hawai‘i are graduates of JABSOM, and 80 percent of *Honolulu Magazine’s* Top Doctors in Hawai‘i are JABSOM graduates.

Like my mother, my niece, Kelsey Ige, had dreams of a career in healthcare. Our family is so fortunate that JABSOM was here to fulfill her dreams. She graduated in the Class of 2018 and doing her residency in Oregon.

But if there is a thread that connects us, it’s because we know the incredible effort, sacrifice, focus, struggle and plain old hard work that it takes to achieve a dream.

Some of you have worked several jobs while in medical school. You’ve been raising children and taking care of families. Others have overcome personal, social, economic or academic challenges.

But you prevailed. You did it. And it has brought you to this point today.

This is a remarkable and exciting time to be a doctor. Being a doctor continues to be one of the most honored and prestigious professions. Doctors are amongst the most trusted professionals.

But the world of health care is changing: The Internet, the super-computer that is your cell phone in your pocket, genomics, and artificial intelligence, will change how you practice as doctors.

Most of your patients, will already have consulted WebMD or Dr. Google for self-diagnosis, BEFORE they see you. They selected you because they found you on Facebook or some other search engine. They researched you and know that you graduated from one the best medical schools in the country, and you had great reviews on Yelp, or Healthgrades.com, or Bestdoctors.com.

There will be many new discoveries and breakthroughs in your lifetimes, new devices like ultrasound wands that connect to your cell phone, that you will embrace in your career.

As you celebrate the completion of medical school and reflect on your transition to your residencies wherever they may take you — as your Governor I have one ask to make of you.

Hawai‘i, like every other community in the world, has a severe shortage of doctors, in virtually every field and specialty. The people of Hawai‘i have invested a lot in each and every one of you...giving you the best medical education in the country. I humbly ask for you to consider giving back to Hawai‘i, and returning to serve the people of Hawai‘i. I will be an active partner in finding ways to help you do that.

You are now medical DOCTORS. You have a degree from this outstanding medical school. What an incredible achievement. You have everything you need now, to move on to the next phase of your journey. I conclude my remarks this morning with one final recommendation.

I strive to “live *aloha*” every day and ask you to do the same. I’ve seen it change the course of action in our community.

Aloha is a life force that defines who we are and why we are here. It is a way of life, a mind set and an attitude.

It is a natural response of love, respect, sharing and acceptance of all.

This attitude creates ripple effects – and lifts up our communities... our families...

It reaches forgotten people in far corners of our state, in our country and world... who see hope in committed young people like you.

As you move on to the next phase in your noble profession — keep adding to your body of work, and the living legacy of the John A. Burns School of Medicine.

Don't ever shy away from moments that challenge you, or that force you to try harder and to dig deeper. It is there that you will discover the strength and the gifts that you never knew you had.

Congratulations, JABSOM Class of 2019.

Aloha!

Author's Affiliation:
Governor of the State of Hawai'i