

I am honored to receive Tulane Medical Alumni Association's highest award. I thank the board for selecting me as Outstanding Alumnus for 2013. To be in the roll call of previous recipients, including pioneering heart surgeon Dr. Michael DeBakey and famed cardiologist Dr. George Burch, is humbling.

Ethical science-based medicine is at risk in every generation. It has been my quest since graduation from Tulane Medical in 1963 to do my part to preserve it. There are those who have never treated a patient and yet advocate and pass laws that sever the trusted patient-physician relationship and the essential patient privacy and medical record confidentiality. If the medical profession doesn't stand up for the patient and do what is in the patient's best interest, the finest medical care the world has ever seen will be relegated to the history books and the equivalent of Orwell's Ministry of Truth will distort it.

Throughout my medical career, I followed the advice of my courageous father, Major Dominic Palmisano, a heroic policeman. He taught me, "Do your homework, have courage, and don't give up. Do this and very little in life is impossible." He gave me this advice when I considered quitting Tulane Medical School as a freshman. That advice was a key factor in my discovery of copper as an essential nutrient for adult health, published in the New England Journal of Medicine in 1974, despite the conventional wisdom of the time that it was not.

And there is the debt we owe our teachers and our families. My teachers inspired me and taught me the art and science of medicine. One special teacher is in the audience tonight, another Tulane graduate, Dr. James E. Brown, Sr. He remains full of wisdom and common sense and I had the privilege to be his surgical partner throughout my career. Special thanks and love to my wife, Robin, and my three children, Mary Ellen, Donna, and Donald Jr. They all supported me during my advocacy for medicine, locally, nationally, and internationally.

I continue to give lectures to medical students and I share with all of them my 6 commandments of medicine, S-E-C-C plus 2. This has been my North Star. Science, Ethics, Courage, and Compassion. The plus 2 are: Do what is in the patient's best interest and do it with the patient's informed consent. Do this and you will never regret being a doctor.

Finally, I strove to leave my views behind in my books on leadership so that my grandchildren and any other curious person would not have to rely on the memories of others. Memories fade with each succeeding generation but the written word lives on. I leave you with this reflection: Treasure each day with enthusiasm. The days are long but the years are short. And remember that the adornments on your soul increase when you keep your loved ones close, even when miles apart or stresses abound. Cherish them.

Thank you.

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