

Many thanks to the faculty and staff of the McWhorter School of Pharmacy.

Special thanks to Dr. DeHart for the invitation to speak to you today; and as always, I'm thankful to Dean Crouch for his efforts in creating a welcoming environment for alums of the School of Pharmacy. (pause)

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On Dr. Alverson's 4th year academic rotation, she told me, "Sam – find a mentor to reach your full potential". (pause)

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Dr. Kyle during my 4th year rotation at Shelby Baptist, told me something to the effect of, "Find an environment where you will enjoy the people – Sam work in an environment that you will feel comfortable in." (pause)

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Cecil Durrett, the store owner and Pharmacist for Eutaw Drug had his pharmacy technicians make us a homemade lunch on our last rotation day. The pharmacy technicians brought pies, chips, potato salad, and soda. Cecil owned the drug store, the bait shop, worked as the nursing home consultant, and ordered the medications for Greene County Hospital.

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On a nephrology rotation at UAB during my fourth year; I had a patient that was in acute renal failure. They wondered if it was because the patient had been tased by police. I reviewed the patient's lab work and found that the patient was HIV positive. I brought this to the attention of the resident physician prior to rounds, asking very studiously, "could this be the issue for our patient's acute kidney failure?" And while this wasn't the reason our patient's kidneys were failing, it was of benefit to the patient, their family, and the healthcare staff to know that patient's HIV status.

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On a rotation at Kids Meds Pharmacy, with Lea Wolsoncroft, I learned dosing parameters for antibiotics commonly used in pediatric patients. I enjoyed it so much that I started to practice calculating milligram per kilogram dosing in my spare time while working as a pharmacy intern at Walgreens. My home store was the Vulcan Walgreens in Homewood; and my preceptor at that store was Tim Lacey.

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I looked at my list of rotations, and honestly I was just so happy to not have to go to class anymore that I didn't care where I had been placed. But one thing was for certain, I knew that I hadn't chosen Children's of Alabama as a site that I wanted to work at. I kept thinking, who swapped out of the Children's of Alabama rotation? Because someone not wanting to be there, must have been the reason I got placed there. Crazy thing about that, right after that rotation my preceptor Dr. Julie Lasseigne recommended to the pharmacy director that I be hired. Two weeks later I started as an inpatient staff pharmacist. And a few weeks after that, I was working the table with Dr. John Arnold, while sharing packs of skittles and candies we'd take turns buying each other at the Go Store. I'll forever be grateful to him for passing me in Pharmaceutics in the Spring Semester of 2009.

Life, life is pretty funny...

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My last story, the first day of my rotation at Solutions Infusion Therapy, I met Jeb Mitchell; a pharmacist and owner of the company. He was having a rough day, and he had just fired an employee for insubordination. He showed me the parking lot and which parking spot to park, he showed me the break room and where I could put my lunch in the fridge. He then took me to his office, and gave me some of his life lessons of owning and managing a pharmacy. All that he asked out of me on that rotation block was that I give good effort. He said something to the effect of, "you get back what you put in." I tell this story, because after working at Children's for nearly a year, I left inpatient pharmacy to help Jeb open the outpatient pharmacy at Children's of Alabama.

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I've told you all of these brief short stories because so much of pharmacy school is studying, taking exams, eating, sleeping, and then repeating. Somewhere in the mix of all the chaos we lose pieces of ourselves. But please, pretty please... take a moment on days like today, and pause for reflection. Review your past, take solace in your present, and look forward to your future. Remember that relationships matter. And the 4th year rotations is the beginning of your pharmacy piggy bank. I hope that you make more deposits than withdrawals in this pharmacy piggy bank during your fourth year, and throughout your career. Because ultimately this life is a quilt which is weaved upon the fabric of relationships.

We lose touch with family, we lose bonds with some of our close friends, some of our loved ones pass away. There's been tears of pain and regret in some of your journeys. And yet there's a hope for personal growth, new relationships, and a bright future.

I want you to remember the hard days as juxtaposed to days like this; you're wearing your white coats, you're smiling, and a joy permeates your body. You should be proud of yourselves. You've earned this moment.

But remember there will be hard days ahead. If you thought school was hard, just wait until you have to deal with the public everyday. Rotations will be your taste of a new reality. You will meet families and patients that may differ from you ethnically, religiously, and socioeconomically; but they're still your patients. And you have to figure out a way to take care of them to the best of your ability — with a smile, a caring attitude, and a good dose of empathy.

Stay grounded, stay humble, and keep your faith in a power higher than man. Because you're only sitting here because God has been faithful to you. So please be faithful to him. God has brought you this far because you will be a servant leader for many families in your community.

I brought up my rotation experiences because these are the memories that I have years later; these are the first moments that I had to learn from, and begin creating memory banks for how I reacted when faced with the new reality that I would one day be a licensed pharmacist, and counseling patients on serious matters regarding their health. The men and women that precepted me, had walked that fourth year path, and had been pharmacists themselves for 10, 20, and 30 years. They didn't want me to fail. But they did want to see me earn my stripes, work hard, and show that I'd be faithful to the pharmacy profession. They wanted to see that I cared, and that I'd study the drug literature, work hard, be consistent in my job performance, and learn community leadership.

So when you go out to your rotation sites in the coming weeks; stay grounded, stay humble, and most importantly stay faithful to God. Because life happens, and we are all tested. Look in front of you, look to your left, look to your right, and look behind you... Remember the people you sat next to on this day. Remember how proud you were today. Remember momma, remember daddy, and remember all the people that prayed for you to make it to this day. People walked these halls before you, and they will walk the halls after you. You have been guided to this point; so please consider helping to guide others to this point in the future.

Be thankful. Tell the people around you thank you. Tell your professors thank you. Tell your preceptors thank you. Tell your patients one day, thank you. Tell God, thank you. Because it is a privilege to be alive. It is a privilege to know that one day you will be a Pharmacist, and that you will be of service to your community. We may not know our paths, but we must walk firmly with faith.

Be the best fourth year that you can be. Be honorable, be studious, be kind, be humble, and build relationships with each community that you have an opportunity to serve. Find honor in your service. And know that people are thankful for your assistance, kindness, and presence.

May God bless you!

And thank you!

Congratulations...