

Dean's Welcome to the Clinical Years

An Open Letter from the Dean to Beginning Third Year Students:

You are about to enter a new, exciting and demanding phase of your education. You have had some introductory clinical experiences during the pre-clerkship years, but it is different to be immersed all day, every day, in hospital life, wearing the white coat you received on your first day in medical school. This is a significant transition and as in all transitions, some aspects will be immediately rewarding; others will require some adjustment.

In the first two years of medical school, lectures, labs and exams were scheduled to maximize the learning process. In hospitals, the needs of patients take precedence over yours; you cannot always study at the time of day you prefer; you cannot always go home when you want to; your obligation to patients and the health care team comes first. As a result, years three and four will place upon you a completely different set of demands and expectations from those you have been accustomed to until now.

During the clinical years you are still expected to give the highest priority to the acquisition of medical knowledge and performance on NBME exams. In addition, you must also now learn to conduct yourself in a professional manner as part of a health care team. This role is quite different from anything in your previous educational experience. You must begin the process of shifting your own self-image and behavior from that of a student, with the license and freedom that often entails, to a doctor with serious responsibilities. You will still be expected to do well on exams, but you will also be judged on your ability to take responsibility, to relate to and work harmoniously with professional colleagues, to exhibit maturity in the way you conduct yourself on the wards and to demonstrate that you are successfully acquiring the communication skills and behaviors needed to relate and care for patients.

Years three and four are demanding, these demands will consume almost 100 percent of your time. Your clinical supervisors must judge you on the basis of your performance as you would be judged as a practicing physician. If you are having personal problems that interfere with your ability to function as a student, you should seek immediate help. The Office of the Dean, Office of Senior Associate Dean of Clinical Studies, Dean of Students, Directors of Medical Education (DME), Clerkship Directors (CD), Faculty Advisors and Faculty are available to help you.

Missing a lecture during the basic sciences years was not considered a serious transgression. During your clinical years, however, missing a lecture or failing to fulfill a ward assignment will call into question your ability to accept the necessary responsibilities required of you as a physician. No unexcused absences are permitted. Permission to leave a rotation, even for a day, requires prior approval from a Clerkship Director or Director of Medical Education.

Your clinical years should be an exciting experience. Your dedicated ambition to becoming a physician, your maturity, and your preparation over the last two years will enable you to handle the demands of the clinical clerkships without difficulty.

You will now begin the work for which you have been preparing for so many years. You will find it infinitely challenging and sometimes frustrating; enormously fun, but sometimes tragic; very rewarding and sometimes humbling. Make the most of it.

Marios Loukas, MD, Ph.D.
Dean, School of Medicine