

An Address to the 2001 LANE Society Inductees
By Wanda Dean Lipscomb, Ph.D.
Director, Center of Excellence for Minority Medical Education and Health.

Welcome this afternoon!

I'd like to thank especially the family members who made it a point to be here with your young people. I thank especially the parents. Obviously, all of us know that the support of a parent is better than the support anybody can ever have. So even as we get older we appreciate so much the fact that we come from families.

Today the LANE Society induction is an occasion we feel is an important activity that your daughter or son has chosen to be a part of. And every year I look at the front row and say: where are the men? And again all I can tell you (referring to Mike Mantinan, the only male inductee) is that you have good company. The cohorts ahead of you will tell you. How do you do it when you are in this group of young wonderful active women and you are the only man?

Now with the changing demographics in America that may give you a signal of some of the things that are coming. Because obviously we know that females outnumber males in the society, just in the general population. And we also know that our population is changing. As we look at the 21st Century we will look at a really different assortment of individuals who will make a different assortment of American dream of ours.

Obviously, as we think about what we have done in LANE, what we are really excited about is to have young people from African American, Latino, Native American and other backgrounds, come together in sort of common interest in pursuing a degree in Medicine. That wonderful wealth of experience that each of us brings from our homes, our cultures, our growing up experiences, and merging it into a learning dynamic, that will be very, very special. And a place like the Michigan State University with over 40,000 students, it's sort of hard to walk into a gathering like this. It's a gathering one has to plan.

As we pause to applaud the success of the inductees today and as we pause to challenge you to continue in the pursuit of excellence, that we think about it in the context of the 21st Century. We are a changing dynamic society and the patients that you will serve in the next 20 years will be very diverse. We know that our Latino population is really exploding. Thirty percent increase per year is what is projected (by the people who do the demographics). The African American society has continued to grow. We are not at a fast pace, we are at a steady pace and a steady pace has always been a fast pace. So as you think about what your challenges are going to be, you are going to bring something very, very special to the practice of medicine. So each of you will bring your own connection, your own experience, your family and cultural beliefs that will help you and your colleagues in becoming a physician. We are very excited about the Lane Society.

I have to use this opportunity to thank Dr. Karen Williams for her energy, constant vigil and her forcing you to meet every other week. And it is on top everything else that you have to do this. Don't stop doing something in order to do LANE. You do everything you are already doing in a n excellent way and add it to doing LANE.

The occasion for us then is to come together with a sense of community to recognize the inductees' excellence, their commitment to work hard, to be great stewards in this educational institution to make their families and parents proud of the fact that they finished their freshman experience at MSU and are seen as sophomores who are well above the average. There are so many things that you can focus your energy on here at MSU -- all those sporting events and all those great parties. But somehow you have figured how to balance your social development with your academic development. And that is a very, very special thing. And so we are happy to pause and recognize that publicly.

We also feel that we are making a connection to you from the College of Human Medicine. This ceremony gives us an opportunity to publicly bond, to send a message to your family and your friends that we are committed to your success; that we are willing to work with you and develop you as a future physician. And hopefully that will give them some sense of comfort as they go back home, to know that even though in a campus of some 40,000 odd students, that there are some faculty and some individuals who are committed to helping you to be successful.

Each time we all come together, we have to really expand our family circles. Families are there for each other in good and bad times. And we don't want to give you the illusion that simply because you are beginning the LANE experience that every thing is going to always be good time. We know that that's far from the truth. Each of you will have your share of disappointments, obstacles, etc., but what we hope is that the LANE family, by coming together with a common purpose, a common goal and a common focus, will make that a more positive journey for you. That you will always know that there is someone you can always call to give you some assistance. Sometimes, you would have to hear from us some feedbacks that wouldn't feel very good, that wont be exactly what you'd want to hear. But you'd know that it is given to you in a positive way, in the hope that you'd be very successful.

And I never appreciated how important that was until I have moved into the position that I am in the College now. I think, as colleagues, what you do for one another is so significant and so different than the feedback you get from your instructor or your parents. There is nothing like collegial feedback – it's a feedback from someone who is your peer, someone who shares the same values as you do.

That is what medicine requires. Medicine requires your willingness to be open and honest with yourself and with your colleagues. Medicine requires everyone to work together, connected. Medicine is at its best when you consult, when you understand that you have a team; when you have colleagues and other healthcare professionals who are helping you to work with your patients to improve the quality of their lives. In essence, that is what physicians do, they help us improve our quality of life.

So we are happy today to have a ceremony to really symbolize your first step towards the profession of medicine, a profession we hope you will love and enjoy.

Part II

You are officially members of the LANE Premedical Society. This membership will afford you some privileges other premedical students do not have. However, with privilege comes responsibility. To whom much is given much is expected.

Recently, we had the company of Dr. Lonnie Bristow, past national president of the American Medical Association. He is the first person of color, the first African American to be in that position. We had the privilege to have him come to the Lansing community to give a presentation that was sponsored by the Mid Michigan Medical Society of African American physicians in the Greater Lansing area.

In his presentation, his comments really centered around the fact that there are no extraordinary people. However, there are ordinary people who rise to meet the demands and needs of an extraordinary time. For me it just captured the essence of what we hope for you in the LANE Society.

I charge you to understand that you may not be an extraordinary person. But you are definitely a unique person who has been fashioned by your maker for a particular purpose. You have to maintain the ability to work with kings and queens and yet also have the ability to work with the common man; to be able to reach high and to be able to reach low. You must strive for excellence in all of your endeavors, yet never step upon another person to reach your goal.

You must be able to soar with the eagles and yet be able to fly within the formation of the geese. You must be prepared to give your life for something you believe in and yet be willing to champion the course of others who cannot speak for themselves. You must understand that winning is not everything, but the will to win is important. Remember that everyone wants success but very few people are willing to make the efforts to be successful.

In the ceremony today, we have underscored excellence for you. We challenge you to think about making a lifetime commitment to learning. We talked about the

importance of being a leader and what we perceive as the key elements of leadership. But more important than anything we talked about service to others and your willingness to give up yourself to others.

I'd like to leave you with a poem that underscores what it is each of you would have to do to be successful. It is titled "Press On."

***Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence
Talent will not
Nothing is more common than unsuccessful individuals with talent
Genius will not
An unrewarded genius is always a problem
Education will not
The world is full of educated derelicts
Persistence and determination alone are of utmost importance***

We charge you to press on. Dream big dreams, but be willing to work to achieve them. Success will be yours if you work hard consistently and keep moving until you reach your dreams. You can be an ordinary person who is raised to meet the demands of our challenging times.

I think that if each of us reflects on the inauguration, yesterday, of our new president George W. Bush, and we reflect back on all the activities that preceded it in the first week of November to the mid week of January, it underscores the fact that we truly are in an extraordinary time. We are fortunate to live in a country with extraordinary opportunities.

And each of you who sits here – the new inductees and the old members – for everyone of you here, there are hundreds and thousands of people just like you who don't have the opportunities to dream the dreams that you dream; haven't had the opportunities at home and the environment to build the framework that you operate from. And as I was looking at the parts of the presidential inauguration, I was thinking how it underscores how wonderful our country is. Because in reality, who sits in the White House doesn't determine who we are. We determine who we are.

We have this opportunity to be the very best we can be everyday. When we wake up in the morning and we start another day, we chart our own course in history. And that is the beauty of living in America. It is a wonderful blessing for us to have. But it means nothing if we don't take advantage of it and if we are not willing to work. So we applaud you for everything that you have done till today but we really encourage you not to stop. You have to keep at it everyday.

And if you ever feel faint of heart, look at the LANE students who are in front of you – the juniors, the seniors; look at the ones who have already graduated and some of the things that they are doing. You can look to some colleagues in the College of Human Medicine. Dr. Kenya Sekoni (present among the audience) is a good example. She is only one of many.

So each of you has something within your reach, something that is extraordinary to do. And what we hope we do is to challenge you to dig and dig. We hope we won't get in the way to keep you from reaching it. But you will hear us challenge you because challenge is good. I don't think you can be good if you don't practice. The only way you get the free throw shot is to practice it over and over and over and over again. You don't just go there each time and toss the ball and it happens to go in. It takes practice. And just like in athletics, we talk about coaching and practicing to be a great student. So before you can become a physician you have to prove to us that you can be a good student.

There are 40,000 students in MSU, around 7,000 students enter MSU each fall. We wish we can say in four years that around 7,000 receive a degree in MSU in the spring. We are way off that number. So we really hope that LANE will give you the opportunity to come together to talk and share about how you can be the best learner you can be.

Being a LANE student does not mean perfection or four points. But you know when you really worked and when you didn't. And you'd recognize when you really put in the time. Because if you can just work 2 1/2 more years to this place and just keep the pace that you have already set for yourself, you'd make it.

Remember that you pay our salaries when you pay your tuition. Should you forget, your parents have not. And if by chance you think that because you have your financial aid you don't pay our salaries, well, you have because you are going to pay those loans back. So this is your investment, you are investing to be here at MSU. Take advantage of it. Learn everything you need to learn as an undergraduate student so when you move on to be a medical student, you have a wonderful foundation. Because there is nothing we can do to go back to help you build the foundation once you come to us.

So we are going to challenge you, for example, we are going to say, why only 3.5 when you were a point away to four points. Because as much as you may hear from your friends that 'grades are not important,' *they are*. Markers always matter, all of us have to deal with markers. If you talk to your parents they have to deal with markers every day. They don't just have to go to work and just do any type of work with no focus on quality of excellence and continue to be employed. Not in these extraordinary times.

So we hope that what you would get from the LANE Society will be something more than just the connection from each other. We hope that you'd use this to test out new things, try out new methods. And that you'd find yourself a better more committed learner two-and-half years down the road. And that you will enter the College of Human Medicine at the end of that two-and-half years down the road.

Thank you all very, very much for coming. My hope is that it was a meaningful ceremony for each of you.