

The Medical School Class of 2020

A doctor mom's perspective on the next generation of physicians

By Susan Reynolds, MD, PhD

RECENTLY I attended my son, Chris' White Coat Ceremony. I was certainly a very proud mom knowing how hard he had worked to get to this special day. I was also struck by the enthusiasm and maturity of his exceptionally bright and talented classmates.

One of the first things I noticed about the class of 2020 was that there are more women than men in the class, 51% to be exact. I knew the figures for women medical students were on the rise, but to see it firsthand was impressive. Only 10% of my classmates were female. In addition 21% of his class self-identifies as underrepresented minorities.

As I watched these excited young students receive their white coats, I thought about how different the world of medicine is now from when I graduated. We did not have White Coat Ceremonies back then. Instead Eli Lilly gave everyone in my class a black bag and a stethoscope. With the passage of time, black bags have all but disappeared, gone the way of the traditional house call and the handwritten chart.

These young people live in a world where technology rules. Keyboarding is second nature to them. On

his first day of class, Chris tweeted: "The cacophony of 139 medical students typing in unison far faster than I am is the soundtrack to our lecture...." I hope that the EMR systems they work on will be much easier to master than for my generation. And maybe, just maybe, some smart millennial will develop an app that will make patient recordkeeping easy and time-saving rather than labor intensive and time-wasting.

The class of 2020 will need to learn not only the latest in clinical care, but also how healthcare systems function. They will have to learn about leadership and the business of medicine. And I hope they will learn how to advocate for their patients and for their own well-being so they can bring about positive changes in a badly broken system.

Sadly, many will have debt in the six-figure range, and may not be able to afford a house, may delay starting a family, or may choose their medical specialty based on finances rather than passion. We need to solve this debt problem so that these best and brightest of students, the future of medicine, can be debt-free when they begin to serve their patients and their White Coat profession. 



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