

**“Ethics in the Dental Profession”
White Coat Ceremony
DDS Class of 2024 / IDS Class of 2024 / DH Class of 2023
University of the Pacific, Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry
Palace of Fine Arts Theater, San Francisco, California
July 23, 2022**

**Mr. Nick Forooghi
Assistant Professor, Department of Diagnostic Sciences**

Student Doctors—today is a symbolic day of pride and rite of passage for you. A passage into belonging to the ranks of your future profession.

I hope you will enjoy this day along with your family and friends.

The White Coat ceremony usually marks the start of a point in your journey when you earn the awesome responsibility of treating real people; patients; other human beings who place their trust in you to do the “right thing” for them.

Trusting you to do the “Right Thing” is the heart of what your ethical obligations are.

This ceremony is symbolic. But we must take symbols seriously for the meaning they wish to convey. A great part of meaning and symbolism in a White Coat is that like all professional markings it is about a privilege, and not a right.

A healthcare professional earns the privilege to enjoy a presumptive trust from the patients. Trust with their body and their mind depending on the ailment or need, and reliance on the knowledge, skill, and discipline of the provider.

And today I asked myself if I were to give you a few pieces of advice about “Ethical Practice” of Dentistry, what would they be?

First, confirm your commitment and intent to always act ethically and professionally. Your intent is the necessary step before taking any conscious action. Intent foreshadows your decisions and the practice that follows.

Remember that your professional life and training at our school reflects the ‘**head, heart, and hands**’ philosophy the school embraces.

Ethics in your profession arises and thrives in your HEART, supported by your knowledge in your mind, and the skills you practice with your hands.

Mark your future practice with professionalism, ethical behavior, empathy, and communication skills that enforce your core values.

Remember this and deeply adopt it, because without this you will be no more than “greatly skilled technicians and business people.” What makes you a complete

professional is the **trust** your patients will place in you every time they sit in an operatory chair and place themselves with vulnerability in your hands. You will have a fiduciary duty to each of them, every time they come for a visit to your office.

Remember the oath you take today is inspired by the Hippocratic oath. You will be doctors. The words of that oath have changed over time, but its intent and **heart** have not.

I will quote a select few words from the *Modern Hippocratic Oath* relevant to ethical practice:

"I will remember that there is art to medicine as well as science, and that warmth, sympathy, and understanding may outweigh the surgeon's knife or the chemist's drug.

"I will not be ashamed to say, "I know not," nor will I fail to call on my colleagues when the skills of another are needed for a patient's recovery."

"I will respect the privacy of my patients, for their problems are not disclosed to me that the world may know." [End of Quotation] These words speak to both "Humility" and "Honesty."

These words speak to your duty of TRUST and keeping CONFIDENCE of your patients.

If you accept the Oath you take today, you show your intent to act ethically and professionally. But, what enables you to know how to PRACTICE ethically and professionally is using the ethical decision-making systems you learn in this school.

So, remember the first and most foundational definition I shared with you in class was a simple, but important one: "Ethics is the Systematic Study of Right and Wrong." On its face this seems remarkably simple. In practice you will be challenged each and every day.

Remember, an ethical choice is not always between two benign and good alternatives. Ethical dilemmas will force you to choose between bad and worse in many cases. You need to be ready to make those tough decisions.

When you finally start your practice, you will have a duty to uphold several ethical and professional codes; the ADA Code, and the code of ethics in any state of the union you choose to practice in. Today, as "Student Doctors", I will remind you of the NORMATIVE principles offered from the American Dental Education Association's (ADEA) Statement on Professionalism in Education.

Competence: Acquiring and maintaining the high level of special knowledge, technical ability, and professional behavior necessary for the provision of clinical care to patients and for effective functioning in the dental education environment.

Fairness: Demonstrating consistency and even-handedness in dealings with others.

Integrity: Being honest and demonstrating congruence between one's values, words, and actions.

Responsibility: Being accountable for one's actions and recognizing and acting upon the special obligations to others that one assumes in joining a profession.

Respect: Honoring the worth of others.

Service-mindedness: Acting for the benefit of the patients and the public we serve and approaching those served with compassion.

I wish you the best of luck as you get closer to achieving the honor of becoming a doctor of dentistry, today celebrate this important milestone with your friends, colleagues and family.