Congratulations to the Warren Alpert Medical School Class of 2010!! You’ve made it. And also congratulations to your families, significant others, dogs, cats and other living things that you love. Your support and care has made it happen.

In keeping with the grand nature of the occasion, we are joined today by three former Deans of this Medical School. Dean Stanley Aronson, Dean David Greer, and Dean Richard Besdine whose respective tenures effectively launched us onto our current trajectory. And welcome to the classes of 1975, 1980, ‘85, ’90, ‘95, ‘00 and 2005 who have been celebrating their reunions during this weekend.

I would like to take a moment to discuss the future of medicine and the changes that your generation will be dealing with– because medicine won’t be the same as in the past. Your generation will be dealing with health care reform, different financial constraints, and more government involvement. While there will be minuses to these changes, the major result should be to allow you to devote more time and focus on your patients. I also believe that the essence of medicine will always remain the same.

One of the biggest changes will be that most of you will be employed in larger system – hospitals, medical schools, large physician groups. Because of this you won’t need to worry as much about running an office, billing, staffing, insurance, profits and loss, cash flow...the business of medicine. You won’t work long hours. You will work in teams. Electronic Medical Records (EMR) will provide better information and more help to you and your patient. These changes will translate into more time, focus and tools for the care of your patients.

Scientifically, you will take advantage of advances in genetics, bioengineering, and pharmaceutical, particularly on an individual, personalized level to have the tools to take far better care of your patients. There will be some downside; less money, less autonomy, and
more accountable because of EMR. But at its core, despite all of these differences medicine will remain the same...it is you and the patient together, often alone and together.

This reminds me of a patient I had when I was an intern. She was a young mother and wife with acute myelogenous leukemia – a usually fatal illness. I took care of her with other house staff and attendings for weeks in the hospital. Towards the end of her life, I remember being called at 2:00AM (and I was exhausted) to put in an IV to give her platelets because she was bleeding. She had almost no veins left after all the treatment so, it took me many tries to finally get the line in, and despite the difficulty I was having and the pain I was causing her, she was extremely grateful. She died soon afterward. Several weeks later, I received a letter from her grieving family expressing their gratitude. They also included her family a gift certificate to a popular restaurant in Boston called Pier 4. My wife and I were poor, so this was a big deal.

This experience illustrates two things. First, we have to show up – the profession can forgive honest mistakes, but we cannot fail to come to our patients and be at their side. Our patient’s needs come before ours. It is at the core of our profession and in return we receive remarkable respect and gratitude. Secondly you are privileged to be present at the beginning and end of life and during life’s greatest travails. With your scientific knowledge, your capability, you art and your humanity, you care for your patients. You are the recipient of all of your patients’ emotions positive and negative, but particularly gratitude and respect. You are a member of a community of physicians worldwide with the same ideals, skills and mission. And as I have said many times before you are in one of the hardest, but the greatest professions.

Many of you will be leaving Brown, but in many senses, you will never leave Brown. Your memories will always be with you. The skills of a doctor and the approach to patients will stay with you, whatever your career path. The school, university, and faculty will always be here for you.

This year I have the great honor of introducing TR Reid who has become one of the nation’s best-known reporters through his coverage of global affairs for The Washington Post, his books and documentary films, and his light-hearted commentaries on National Public Radio. His latest
book ‘The Healing of America,” was published in the fall of 2009 and quickly became a national best-seller and also changed the way that I look at healthcare in America. His speech is entitled: “The Moral Imperative”. Please join me in welcoming TR. Reid.