

The White Coat Ceremony:

A Mentor's Gift



For the students of the
University of Vermont College
of Medicine on the occasion of the
White Coat Ceremony, January 2000

White cloaked for life's rehearsal
Your patients' and your own
This wardrobe bears a promise
Of the physician you'll become.
A promise fulfilled only
For those who share the oath
Of studying for others
Of commitment to their health.

"Too soon, too big, too much
To do—"I'll fail!"
Teachers, parents, patients watch
You struggle, all the while,
Trusting your compassion
To translate into skill,
Your persistence and your queries
To forge mastery from toil.

Patients know you're acting
Out a play on their behalf,
Theater in the round, rehearsing
Your professional Self.
So study with and for them
Reflect, correct, and laugh.
Give them all due courtesy
For gifts not recognized enough.

Learn the lines, mark the steps.
Eschew the lights and glamour.
Respect the mysteries of life,
Call forth its shaman powers.
When all that's learned is not enough
When neediness is shared
The warp and woof, the art and science
Of trust is truly earned.

Speak forth against
false witnesses
Make evident your role
In service of community
For the needy and the frail.
Keep confidence and dignity
For flaws you may unveil,
This calling you have answered
Honors every human soul.

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