

To our students

Expectations

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Election to ΑΩΑ is not just an honor; it is a two-way contract. In return for your being recognized as an outstanding medical student, you will be responsible for living up to the expectations of those who have successfully preceded you.

What are these expectations? Here is my list, my personal perspective about your responsibilities not only to your patients and profession, but to yourselves.

1.

Strive to be the best at whatever you do

I'm not going to stipulate a particular career path—among you are represented a wide variety of postgraduate education plans, from Anesthesia to Urology. Also, within those specialties, you'll be in a variety of settings and will be doing diverse activities in various proportions. Whatever it is, you should strive for excellence—living up to, and even exceeding your extraordinary potential. As you reflect on the past several years and think about the clinicians, teachers, and researchers you have most respected, just remember that for the next generation, those people will be you.

2.

Use your own knowledge, skills, and experience to teach others, even if you don't intend to be a medical school professor

We all learned that the root of the word "doctor" is "docere," which means "to teach." As a house officer, you'll be teaching medical students, colleagues, and your patients. As a practicing physician there are countless opportunities to teach, even in a community-based or rural practice that is not directly connected with a medical school. Take advantage of that opportunity! It's a privilege to help shape the learning of others, and there is no more effective way to learn something than by teaching it. In the future, when those you have taught go on to their own successful careers, you can be justifiably proud of whatever role you played in their professional development and in helping them achieve their success.

3.

Become part of the broader community of physicians in your discipline.

Participating in specialty and subspecialty organizations is a wonderful way of interacting with colleagues and advancing the interests of your particular discipline. There will be many opportunities for leadership roles and for serving on important committees, ranging from education to policy. As a member of ΑΩΑ, you have demonstrated and have been recognized for your abilities, and it is important for physicians with those abilities to hold leadership roles within the profession.

4.**Remember your primary commitment to patients and their interests.**

Our ultimate goal is to best serve our patients—as direct caregivers, as researchers contributing to understanding and curing disease, or as teachers amplifying our impact on patients through other physicians and future physicians. Always put yourself in the shoes of your patients, anticipating their needs, anxieties, and the effects of illness on them and on their family members. Remember, we are all patients as well as physicians, and we should live up to standards that we would like our own physicians to have.

5.**Recognize that the education of a physician is a lifelong process of learning that only begins in medical school**

Medicine is a continually evolving field, and since half of what you know now may be proven incorrect in the future, you need to ensure that you're not wedded to knowledge that will be superseded. I would return to the letters *alpha*, *omega*, and *alpha*—AΩA—and use them as a metaphor for your education as a physician. I propose that the first alpha refers to the beginning of your medical school education, the omega refers to the completion of medical school, and the final alpha refers to the beginning of the rest of your lifelong education. But this second alpha is not followed by an omega because that component of your education is never finished—it is truly lifelong.

6.**Be an excellent role model for others—trainees, colleagues, and other members of your community**

Don't underestimate the impact your behavior has on others. What you do and how you act will be picked up and emulated by others. You should recognize this influence and behave accordingly, living up to the highest standards.

7.**Be willing to take a chance, accept a risk, and make the most of professional opportunities you feel are right for you**

This expectation is a bit of personal advice based on my own experience: I took a chance by writing a major review article very early in my career. It was accepted and led to other writing opportunities critical to my own career development. You should seize an attractive opportunity, and then run with it!

8.**Don't neglect your personal and family life**

Although everything I've mentioned could be construed as meaning that you should lead the one-sided, monastic life of a dedicated professional, this is certainly not the case. Each of us can live up to the first seven expectations if he or she is happy and gratified in his or her personal life, and has enjoyed a commitment to family and friends. In practical terms, this means keeping up with interests outside of medicine: hobbies and recreational reading, for example. If you have children, it means enjoying them through their childhood and really having a chance to watch them grow—spending time with them and participating in the activities that are so critical to their own development. Keeping this principle and expectation in mind is not just for your own benefit, it's also for the benefit of your family and friends, as well as your patients, since a happy physician makes a good doctor. The more satisfied you are in your personal life, the more likely you are able to give of yourself to your patients, and the better the doctor you will be.

Eight expectations—you may revise these, generate your own. But always have expectations to live up to.

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