

Please enjoy the speech given by Dean Sarandeep Huja to the DMD Class of 2021 on the day of their Hooding:

Greetings DMD 2021, honored guests, family and friends from the James B Edwards College of Dental Medicine. What a year it has been? We are finally here. It's hard to believe though, looking back through the eyes of the early part of the pandemic. More reason for always being hopeful. Much has transpired and much should not be forgotten. I ask all of you, that in your time, please take a moment to reflect on the lives lost and lives altered forever due to the pandemic throughout the world. No one unfortunately remains untouched. Even my 6 yr. old daughter who has been in a new school and in person learning since Labor Day, says "Mama – I have not seen my friends faces"

However today, while coming to the event, I hear the jingle in my head of U2's song – "it's a beautiful day, don't let it get away". It truly is and thank you for the opportunity to celebrate. We have been forced to learn so much in this past year. It's not only the broadening of our lexicon. Early on in the pandemic we heard the terms SARS CoV2, COVID 19, N95, ventilator, Pandemic, community spread, flattening the curve, etc. which are firmly imprinted in our mind, By Summer of 2020 we hear about contact tracing, mRNA vaccine, and later of twindemic, spike protein, antibody, herd immunity. We also heard about coronocation, drive by birthday celebrations both of which I have experienced like many of you. We have used the word "Unprecedented" unprecedentedly, as it depicts the situation we are in. My favorite though is that no virtual meeting is complete without hearing the words "you're muted". That aside.....

Our faculty and staff have worked extremely hard and I know they are exhausted at times. But they persist. You may ask why. Today is the "reward" for which everyone has worked so hard. Our DMD class of 2021 is being hooded and some are going through commissioning into our military. This is such an immense honor for us and I am so excited we have gathered here today for an in-person ceremony. With that in mind, I want to especially reach out to the families, mothers, fathers, spouses, grandparents and so many loved ones in your family, who have sacrificed so much and waited years for this event. I view these events, through the lens of the Statement of intents that contain amazing life stories. I review these stories when writing the Deans letter for each and every student applying for advanced programs. So, thank you families, for sharing your loved one with us over the last four years. You watched your family member at CDM work hard through high school, college, and now in professional school, miss family events because of their education was a priority, so that they could be here today. We are so proud of this class of DMD 2021. They've achieved all the ambitious goals set forth and it is quite mind-boggling that they could do this in the midst of a pandemic. So today, each graduate should leave here very proud of their accomplishments, which are truly theirs. The knowledge and experience you have gained will continue to grow through your practice, residencies, military service and wherever your careers may lead. I am certain that each of you will be very successful. On this important day, you join the 200,000 dentists in the US.

Transitions are difficult. I had similar doubts when I decided in 1992, to board a British Airways plane one way to pursue my education in the United States. Of course, nothing comes without hard work. Remember, you have the keys to your life-long success through your education at MUSC and beyond. Please know that we the faculty and staff and the University, to who I am immensely indebted, will always be here to support you in every way.

If there is something, I can leave you with – Always have the courage to do the right thing – but remember it most likely will not be the easiest way out. Please care about your patients, without judgement, for they do not know about the technical and diagnostic skills that you bring. Take care of your family and your loved ones and friends. Cherish them with renewed vigor and commitment, something that these hard times have taught us. I would be remiss, without thanking Dr. Javed and his awesome team in Student affairs for organizing this event.

Now I wish to request Dr. James Lemon, who is the Chairman of our MUSC BOT, and an alum of class of 1978, and a practicing oral and maxillofacial surgeon to come to the podium to kindly address our audience. We are honored and grateful to you for your leadership especially during the pandemic year. We know you and other MUSC leaders have made very difficult choices and spent countless hours. We are grateful for your collective wisdom and for guiding the MUSC Enterprise through these challenging times.

Congratulations, CDM Class of 2021!