

Prologue

“Honoring the Past, Creating the Future”

*The Last Commencements of the HU and MCP Schools
of Medicine and the First Commencement of the MCP-HU
School of Medicine*

May 28 and 29, 1998. Broad Street, Philadelphia

Broad Street, one of Philadelphia’s most historic thoroughfares, was festooned with banners as the medical students marched to the Academy of Music—the performing arts center that was home to the Philadelphia Orchestra—to receive their long-awaited doctor of medicine degrees. The banners, fluttering in the breezes of those two hot, humid days, bore the names of the MCP and Hahnemann School of Medicine and the Allegheny University of the Health Sciences of which it was a part.¹ Emblazoned with the words “Honoring the Past, Creating the Future,” which was created by a medical student and selected as the slogan for the three-year celebration of the sesquicentennial anniversa-

1. As can be seen in the list of organizations in the Appendix, the nomenclature for AHERF and its various components can be confusing, in part because the names changed frequently. Before the merger of MCP and HU, Hahnemann was composed of a medical school, a graduate school, and a school of allied health professions and had been granted status as a health sciences university in 1981 by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. In 1994, after the merger, the consolidated entity was named MCP and Hahnemann University (MCP-HU). Then, in 1996, MCP-HU was renamed Allegheny University of the Health Sciences (AUHS). At the time of the 1998 graduation ceremonies, AUHS consisted of the medical school, called MCP-HU School of Medicine—which we will refer to as MCP-HU—and health professions, nursing, and public health schools.

ries of Hahnemann University and the Medical College of Pennsylvania, the banners proclaimed the schools' 150th birthdays.

The graduations marked the symbolic end of two historically significant medical schools: the Medical College of Pennsylvania (MCP) and Hahnemann University (HU). MCP, founded in 1850 as the Female Medical College of Pennsylvania, in 1987 became part of a nonprofit health care system, the Allegheny Health, Education and Research Foundation² (hereafter referred to as AHERF or Allegheny). HU, which began in 1848 as the Homeopathic College of Pennsylvania, was acquired by Allegheny in 1993 and merged with MCP. The graduates had been the first students to matriculate at the consolidated MCP and Hahnemann School of Medicine in summer 1994 and the last students to receive degrees in the names of their once separate schools. For, until the classes of 1998 graduated, MCP-HU had approval from the accrediting body for medical schools, the Liaison Committee on Medical Education, to have three degree tracks: for students admitted to MCP and to HU before January 1, 1995, the date the merger became legally effective, whose degrees would be in the name of their respective schools, and for students who entered the consolidated school beginning in 1995 and would receive degrees from MCP-HU beginning in 1999.

Inside the Academy of Music

The commencement ceremonies for the Hahnemann students were held first, on May 28, followed by the MCP exercises on May 29. That sequence, like so many other decisions by the medical school's administration, had caused days of unrest and discord on the part of students, alumnae and alumni, and many faculty, in this case about which school seemed to be receiving favored priority for its commencement date.

We (Carla Messikomer and I) were there for both graduations. They were milestone events in the short history of the merger and, we had long since decided, should be witnessed and documented as part of our study. At a more personal level, we knew many of the graduates and their teachers, having observed them in many settings and talked with them on many occasions during the past four years. As watchers and listeners, who by then had very much become participant observers, we were forcefully struck by the unsettling, almost eerie quality of the ceremonies. The dominant figure in the merger and in the running of AHERF and its subsidiaries, Sherif S. Abdelhak, was strikingly conspicuous by his absence. Abdelhak had been the corporation's president and chief executive officer since 1986 and had orchestrated the acquisitions of both MCP and Hahnemann. In March 1994 he formally announced new organizational titles, structural changes, and the university's name—it "will be known as MCP and Hahnemann University

2. AHERF, more properly, was what sociologist Paul Starr has termed a "polycorporate" enterprise: a nonprofit organization with for-profit subsidiaries (Starr 1982:437).

(MCP-HU)—promptly shortened to MCPHU (pronounced *Mcfoo*) by students. As part of his announcement, Abdelhak revealed that he now was president and CEO of MCP-HU as well as AHERF's chief. Then, in February 1998, as abruptly as he had become head of the university four years earlier, Abdelhak relinquished that position. Following consultation with the chairman of the university and AHERF boards, he announced, he had appointed his colleague Donald Kaye, MD, president and CEO of the Philadelphia-area group of hospitals called Allegheny University Hospitals—East, or Allegheny East, and the longtime former chair of MCP's Department of Medicine, as president and CEO of the now renamed Allegheny University of the Health Sciences effective March 1. It was startling news, made as rumors were swirling around the university that AHERF had serious financial problems. Abdelhak had clearly relished his academic role, so what, nervous faculty, staff, and students wondered, did his abdication and replacement by Kaye mean?

Given that the two graduations symbolically marked the end of HU and MCP as distinct medical schools, we had thought that the ceremonies would involve an appreciative recognition of their celebrated traditions and meaning to their graduates. We were wrong. There was a “Sesquicentennial Recognition” statement at the end of the commencement programs, which explained why it “is a time to honor the rich histories” of the two schools and “also a time to look to the next millennium and create a future that would make our founders proud.” Both programs also included an identical “Letter to the Class of 1998” over the joint signatures of the presidents of their alumnae and alumni associations, which observed, “You have the honor of being the last class of medical students to graduate from” MCP and HU, and “you [the students] have also had the opportunity to ‘bridge the gap’ with a new partner in Allegheny University of the Health Sciences.” Apart from these brief printed acknowledgements, and a tribute to MCP by one of its most distinguished, long-term faculty members and an honorary degree recipient, only a few passing references were made to these being the final commencements of Hahnemann and MCP. The exercises proceeded, for the most part, in routine formats, no different from previous graduations.

In his opening remarks at the Hahnemann graduation on May 28, President Kaye mentioned that it was the 150th anniversary of the school's founding, but took no note of its also being the last commencement. He did, however, pay tribute to the medical school's parent organization, stating, “I am confident that throughout your careers you will be proud to claim Allegheny University of the Health Sciences as the institution that your alma mater has become.”³ Those assembled in the Academy of Music then listened to welcoming remarks by the university board chair and the conferring of an honorary degree by President Kaye on Philadelphia mayor Edward

3. Statements made during the 1998 HU and MCP graduations and the 1999 MCP-HU graduation are from transcripts prepared from videotapes of the ceremonies.

G. Rendell, followed by the mayor's commencement oration, the annual student and faculty awards, recognition of the alumni, and remarks by the class of 1998 president. The only explicit recognition of the historically and symbolically meaningful nature of the commencement was made by Jeffrey Puglisi, president of the Medical Student Institute—the students' governing body. "We are," he noted in presenting the annual Golden Apple Award for outstanding teaching, "the end of an era as the last class graduated from Hahnemann University." Then, to exuberant applause and cheers from the students and their families and friends, the graduates received their diplomas, took the Oath of Hippocrates, and became the last group of new physicians to be inducted into the HU alumni association.

The next day, the MCP program also began with welcoming remarks by President Kaye, who remarked that it was the school's 146th graduation and delivered the same recognition of AHERF and its health sciences university as he had at the HU graduation. The MCP ceremony, however, did have a few more explicit acknowledgements of the special nature of this event and what it should mean to its participants, in keeping with the school's long tradition of emphasizing its history. In her commencement address, honorary degree recipient Nancy Dickey, MD, president-elect of the American Medical Association, mentioned that this was the last class to graduate from MCP. Other recognitions of the import of this day came from Maurice Clifford, MD, president emeritus of MCP, who, in presenting the Clifford Leadership Award for Student Achievement, said in a proud and nostalgic voice, "We close a chapter in the honored history of this unique college." Next in the ceremonies, as part of his charge to the graduates before conferring their degrees, President Kaye told them, "As the last class to graduate from the separate Medical College of Pennsylvania you are now part of the story of an institution that has a rich history stretching back nearly 150 years. However, the MCP you have grown to love is still here and will always be here as a core part of our health sciences university. . . . [N]ext year we will celebrate the first commencement of [the] students from the combined Medical College of Pennsylvania–Hahnemann University School of Medicine of Allegheny University of the Health Sciences."

After the awarding of degrees, the investiture, and the administration of the Hippocratic Oath, a thoughtful and moving address was given by the newly minted Dr. David Gelman, selected by his classmates to deliver the Graduate Remarks. He spoke about the founding of MCP and the changes in American society and medicine that have taken place since that time. However, he said, he wanted to focus on the things that have endured, especially the process of becoming a physician and medicine as "a practice of caring." He then gave "a word to [MCPs'] preceptors, the administration, and lastly, a word to the class of 1998, the final class of MCP." To the administration, with what seemed to us to be implicit reference to the upheavals of the merger, Dr. Gelman said, "If the history of MCP and the Woman's Medical College has demonstrated anything, it's that revolutionary

changes within an established institution can be accomplished without sacrificing essential goals and ideals. We the students of the Medical College of Pennsylvania bequeath the legacy of MCP and the Woman's Medical College to you and to our peers to follow. Treasure this legacy as we have, safeguard its ideals as we approach this institution's sesquicentennial and beyond."

The ceremony closed with brief parting remarks to the class of 1998 by Dr. June Klinghoffer, who had begun her medical career in 1941 as a student at the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania and been a key member of the MCP faculty since 1948. In conferring an honorary degree on Dr. Klinghoffer earlier in the ceremony, President Kaye observed that she, "perhaps more than any single individual, has defined the Medical College of Pennsylvania over the last half-century." "Your classmate, Dr. Gelman," Dr. Klinghoffer told the new physicians, "drew a stirring image of the rich experiences you have shared these past four years and he distilled for us the essence, the ideals, the spirit of this very special medical college." She continued,

I want you to know that I have followed your class closely and have felt a very special connection with you, knowing that you would be the last class to graduate from the Medical College of Pennsylvania. This is an event of historic significance—marking the poignant end of one chapter in our WMC/MCP saga and the beginning of our next chapter. It is reassuring and heart-warming to know that you recognize and treasure the special spirit, the soul of our school just as I recognized and began to treasure it as a student here in the 40's. In such a way, our legacy lives and will continue to live on.

Beyond what, to us, was their surprisingly routine proceedings, the atmosphere at both graduations struck us as unduly somber, in hindsight seeming to presage the events that were about to unfold. Less than a week later, on June 5, Sherif Abdelhak was abruptly removed as president and CEO of AHERF by its board of directors. Then, on July 21, less than a month after MCP's and HU's final graduations, AHERF filed for bankruptcy. It was the first academic health system to declare bankruptcy and, with debts initially reported to be \$1.3 billion, also became the largest nonprofit bankruptcy in the history of such proceedings in the United States.

May 21, 1999. Broad Street, Philadelphia: What a Difference a Year Can Make

We returned to the Academy of Music a year later. This time we had come to witness the commencement of the first class of students from the consolidated school. They had entered MCP-HU in summer 1995, beginning their medical education during an often tumultuous time of efforts to merge the organizational structures, curricula, departments, and faculty of the two schools. As

we watched the class of 1999 march down Broad Street and enter the ornate Academy building, we thought back to the events during their education that had led some to call themselves “merger guinea pigs.” And as we too entered, took our seats, and gazed around the auditorium, we thought, “What a difference a year can make.”

The Allegheny corporation and its health sciences university were no longer on the scene. Now, the banners on Broad Street and inside the Academy of Music heralded another health care corporation, Tenet, another university, Drexel, and a rechristened health sciences university, once again named MCP and Hahnemann University. Allegheny’s sesquicentennial slogan, “creating the future,” we reflected, had proved to be an extraordinarily ironic one.

Tenet, the country’s second-largest for-profit hospital chain, headquartered in Santa Barbara, California, had acquired Allegheny’s eight Philadelphia-area hospitals and the health sciences university in a U.S. bankruptcy court auction in fall 1998. Their bid of \$345 million included \$60 million for the acquisition of Allegheny University of the Health Sciences, \$30 million to cover start-up expenses for reorganizing the medical school, and a \$33 million annual grant for the school for at least three years. The sale to Tenet was contingent on a management agreement with Drexel University to operate the university’s medical and other schools, a proposal that Drexel’s board of trustees initially turned down in October 1998. But within two weeks, Drexel’s board unanimously reversed its decision, in the wake of appeals by the mayor and governor to accept the management contract and thus avert the possible closure of Allegheny’s hospitals, and an agreement by AHERF’s creditors to give the university \$50 million for its endowment fund.

On November 10, the effective date of Tenet’s ownership, the university and hospitals restored their pre-AHERF names. By the end of the day not a single sign bearing the Allegheny name was visible. A large banner was hung from Hahnemann Hospital, proclaiming, “Let the healing begin,” and music blared from loudspeakers on Race and Broad Streets as Tenet celebrated its entry into the Philadelphia health care market. Speaking to a crowd of some 800 staff, local officials, and Tenet executives, the company’s chief operating officer promised, “We will be here for the long haul. This is not a short term visit” (Warner, Bishop, and Stearns 1998).

As the May 21 graduation exercises began, we watched a new cast of university officials, attired in Drexel’s blue and gold robes rather than the blue and red colors of Allegheny, assemble on the stage. Where Allegheny University’s president, Donald Kaye, had stood a year earlier, the stage was dominated by the forceful presence of the president of Drexel and MCP-HU, Constantine Papadakis. Provost Leonard Ross was gone, as was the medical school’s dean, Barbara Atkinson, replaced by Drexel and MCP-HU provost Richard Astro and interim dean Warren Ross. Another board chairman, representing a new nonprofit corporation, was there to offer the welcoming remarks given the previous year by the Allegheny corporation’s board chair-

man, William Snyder III. The new chairman, Manuel (Manny) Stamatakis, also a member of Drexel's board and a member of the former Allegheny University board, had been named head of the nonprofit Philadelphia Health and Education Corporation, created in late 1998 as the new organizational entity under which MCP-HU emerged from bankruptcy.

The faculty ranks, too, had changed. As had been true the previous year, a relatively small number of full-time basic-science and clinical faculty were present. But the number of those who attended had dwindled: some had chosen to depart for new jobs, others had not had their contracts renewed as Drexel and Tenet sought to remedy the medical school's deficit. The greatest void that day was created by the untimely deaths of two esteemed faculty and the terminal illness of a third, each of whom, to their students and colleagues, had embodied the spirit of their school and the best qualities of its teachers. Dr. Angelo Pinto, assistant professor of microbiology and immunology, who had delivered the invocation at MCP's final graduation in May 1998, died suddenly in July that year, less than two months after the commencement. Dr. Suzanne Zarro, associate dean for admissions and student affairs, who had received Hahnemann's Golden Apple Award and the Sesquicentennial Recognition Award at HU's final graduation, was bedridden from her long battle with cancer and died two months later, in July 1998. Dr. Joel Roslyn, chairman of surgery, who had been a driving force in the effort to salvage and preserve the university and medical school after AHERF plunged them into bankruptcy, was fatally ill with a melanoma diagnosed soon after the university emerged from bankruptcy and was too ill to attend the commencement he had fought so hard to ensure; he died at age 48 in July 1999.

Compared with the sparse acknowledgement of the symbolic importance of the last MCP and HU commencements in 1998, this graduation was marked by an abundant recognition of its "historic" significance as the first MCP-HU class to receive its degrees and the first ceremony in "partnership" with Drexel. Speakers also took note of the stress and uncertainty of "last summer and fall," when Allegheny declared bankruptcy and the future of the medical school and its parent university was in doubt. "What a trip it's been for all of us"—students, faculty, family—said Robert Alteveer, associate professor of physiology, as he began an ebullient invocation. "While you [the graduates] struggled [while away from the school at your rotations], we, your faculty back home, had quite a year too." "We greet you," he continued, "as the first truly unified class—the "same curriculum for all of you. . . . We greet you as a truly unified faculty. . . . The HU-MCP merger is now far behind us." "The tremendous turmoil of last summer and fall," Dr. Alteveer went on to say,

the unexpected death of a number of pivotal members among our ranks . . . only brought us closer. It identified our true leaders and it stiffened our resolve to see you through and to protect the future of those who are following behind you. When Drexel agreed to provide

our framework for survival we knew that we would do more than survive. We work incredibly well together. We learned to be efficient, to cover for each other, to dump what each merging institution should have dumped years ago, and to elaborate on what worked well regardless of origin, and what resulted was a professional and creative work environment which we all treasure. . . . Like you, your faculty became unified. Sure, there's some nostalgia for the old Woman's Medical College and for Hahnemann, but we followed the advice of the eminent philosopher, Graham Nash, from Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young, who sang, "Don't let the past remind you of what you are not now." We are proud of our past but we are new, we are one, and we look to the future first. We think that we should become a permanent part of Drexel—the Hahnemann and Woman's Medical College of Drexel—boy, that sounds wonderful. As you go out of here, we need you to carry this message of unity, pride, and quality.

The welcoming remarks by Drexel and MCP-HU's president Constantine Papadakis also were celebratory ones:

Today we have special cause for celebration as this institution completes a challenging phase of its own journey. Less than seven months ago our graduates, along with their faculty and staff, faced an uncertain future as the survival of this university [MCP-HU] hanged [*sic*] in the balance. It is said, though, that every crisis contains an opportunity. In this case the opportunity was for members of the community to come together in support of the Medical College of Pennsylvania–Hahnemann University and its future.

We have many people to thank for this historic day as we mark the first commencement of [MCP-HU] under its new name and the first under its partnership with Drexel University. We are grateful for the encouragement of the Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the mayor of the City of Philadelphia, and we thank Tenet Healthcare Corporation for its invitation to Drexel to operate this university. We acknowledge Drexel's Board of Trustees for its vision and its commitment and we thank the Trustees of the Philadelphia Health and Education Corporation which oversees this institution and which has played such a critical role in setting [MCP-HU] back on course. We now stand at an important new threshold and can move forward with great confidence to the future. . . . I anticipate [that the graduates will see] a host of innovations and synergies emerging from the partnership between [MCP-HU] and Drexel University. . . . It is a commencement for everyone and a time of new beginning for all.

The graduation address was delivered by honorary degree recipient C. Everett Koop, a renowned pediatric surgeon who had been surgeon in chief at Children's Hospital of Pennsylvania from 1946 to 1981 and then served as U.S. surgeon general from 1982 to 1989. Interim dean Warren Ross then began the presentation of student and faculty awards. He prefaced the first award, the new Joel Roslyn student award, by a moving tribute to Dr. Roslyn. He began by recalling how Roslyn had built up the department of surgery when he came to MCP as its chair in 1992. However, he continued,

Dr. Roslyn's major contribution to our organization . . . was a very different one. In the dark days of summer and fall [of 1998] Dr. Roslyn stood tall and spoke clearly for the values of a university and a medical school at a time when forces that were well beyond the control of the medical school threatened its very existence. The clarity of his message, his devotion to the values, reminded those who were here of another individual who stood tall in a dark time, another individual who said "never give up, never give up, never give up"—Winston Churchill. And so you didn't give up . . . and the university survived. And only one month after the university learned it was to survive, Joel learned that God had a different plan to for him. Today he does not walk our halls with us on a daily basis, but his example lives on, and in his memory we have created the Joel Roslyn Award.

The day's final address was the Graduate Remarks delivered by Dr. Amy Burden, class of 1999: "We stand here," she reminded her classmates,

as the first graduating class of the merger . . . and the first class to be graduated in partnership with Drexel University. This day is even sweeter as it comes after months of uncertainty and change. Rarely do students learn about school issues from the evening news, or use the appearance, disappearance, and reappearance of television crews to predict the future of their school [spoken with an ironic smile on her face and in her tone]. We learned to accept these events with a spirit of adventure and resilience that characterizes our class. Rather than believe those who predicted the worst, this crisis brought us together around the goal of preserving our much loved school.

And then, following the benediction, to the strains of the recessional, the 1995 merger guinea pigs, now doctors of medicine, marched forth from the Academy of Music.