

Speaking Notes

Convocation – Faculty of Dentistry

May 30, 2025 | 5:00pm

Rebecca Cohn Auditorium

- Good afternoon, graduates.
- Before I say anything else: congratulations. You've done it. You've survived the coursework, clinics, long hours, rubber gloves, SIM lab, high-speed handpieces, clinical notes, and having impressions made of your mouth. You've survived the vending machine dinners and the occasional case that kept you up at night. And now you've emerged not only as graduates – but also as dentists and dental hygienists, professionals entrusted with care, with precision, and with the possibility of changing lives, one patient at a time.
- There's a story I love about this Faculty's beginnings. When Dalhousie set out to establish a dental school more than a century ago—back in 1912—there were some who said it was “quite impossible” to do so on the East Coast.
- And yet, here you are.

- In the decades since, Dalhousie's Faculty of Dentistry has not only proven it was possible—it has become a national leader. It was the first dental school in Canada to be fully integrated into a university. One of the earliest to graduate women—in 1919. Our faculty has pioneered embracing the perspective that dentistry is not about teeth—it's about a person.
- In 1947, then-Dean Woodbury captured something essential about this profession. He wrote that dental education must “equip a student to think and to do; to have knowledge and skill; the educated mind and the trained hand.” And he added that neither, by itself, is enough.
- You know this. Because your education has demanded both—intellectual rigour and physical technique. You have trained your minds and your hands. You have developed the discipline, the dexterity, the diagnostic sense, and perhaps—most miraculously—the endurance required to explain flossing to your patients for the fiftieth time.
- But your training has also asked you to dream. To imagine a profession that responds to the realities of inequality, to the needs of new communities, to the whole human being sitting in the chair.

- In 1969, an editorial in the Dalhousie Dental Journal urged the profession never to “ignore the social problems of the community.” That editorial called on dentists and dental hygienists to work alongside public health nurses, social workers, psychologists, nutritionists, and educators. It imagined something integrated—something deeply human.
- Today, the Faculty is still realizing that vision. From the GAP Clinic, which serves new immigrants and refugees, to the North End Community Clinic, you have immersed yourselves in interprofessional work. You are becoming the kind of practitioners who ask: Who are we not reaching? And what can we do about that?
- Some of you will go on to specialize. Some will stay in Nova Scotia; others will travel farther afield. You’ll all make a difference. I hope you’ll keep asking hard questions. I hope you’ll listen carefully and laugh often. And I hope—on the hardest days—you’ll remember how much this work matters.
- As you leave this stage and begin the next chapter of your professional lives, know this: you carry a legacy of care. A tradition of public service. A model of excellence grounded in community. And you carry the hope of the faculty who taught you, the patients who trusted you, and the people who are counting on you—even if they haven’t met you yet.

- And if all else fails, keep a toothbrush in your pocket. It's amazing how many conversations can start—or end – with an illustration of how to ensure periodontal health.
- We are so proud of you. Congratulations to the Faculty of Dentistry Class of 2025.