

# Chronological: Toledo, Ohio Medical School Commencement

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speech to be  
given on  
June 4, 2004

**SENATOR DANIEL K. INOUE**

**SPEECH JUNE 2004**

**TOLEDO, OHIO**

**MEDICAL SCHOOL COMMENCEMENT**

**Toledo, Ohio  
Medical School Commencement**

**Ever since I was 12 years old, my dream and my life's goal was to be a physician—more specifically, an orthopedic surgeon. During the early days of my youth, the family resources made this mission and dream unrealistic and beyond my grasp.**

**However, I did pursue the dream, however, the circumstances of the war made it an impossibility. Throughout the years that followed, though the dream was an impossible one, my interest in medicine and the delivery of health care has always been uppermost in my mind.**

**I have been a politician now for 50 years, and I have had the great privilege and honor of serving in the legislative branch of the super power of this planet. We have become in some eyes the most respected nation and in others the most hated.**

**However, we are still a land of many dreams, and we can see this in the statistics of our land. More men, women, and children smuggle themselves into our ports of entry than any other. Many others sneak across our borders, north and south, and our embassies and consulates across the world are overburdened with requests for immigrant status, and the waiting list is long. The number of illegal immigrants is in the millions.**

**Among the attractions is the knowledge that America is the most advanced of all nations in the science of medical and health care.**

**And yet, many of our people are not able to enjoy the full benefit of our advanced science. Over 43 million of our men, women, and children are not covered by health insurance, either because they cannot afford it or are not aware. There are thousands who suffer strange pains and aches, but hoping for the best, struggle through another day—hoping the pain does not signal a terrible ailment.**

**I became a Member of Congress when Medicare was debated, and it was cursed by some as the first step to socialized medicine. However, those who supported it felt it was the answer for providing health care for all—not just the rich, but for all.**

**Today, we still find that despite advances in science, and with all the new drugs and equipment, there is still debate and struggle as to how best to fulfill the dream of universal health care.**

**Though my first love was, and continues to be, medicine, I am obviously not an expert, but in the 50 years of service to my people in Hawaii, I have sensed and concluded that of all the obstacles to the dream of affordable health care, there is one that has never been discussed—and I wish to suggest that that obstacle is within grasp of solution if we open our minds and our hearts.**

**The health care delivery machinery of our land is more than just physicians. It should include subspecialties, with all their specialized skills—such as nurse anesthetists, psychologists, podiatrists, optometrists, and others. In my case, I have often benefitted from the care of these specialists.**

**There was a time in my life when my left eye did not serve me as well as it should have. Several ophthalmologists checked me out and told me I should take up a regimen of exercise, and that my vision would clear up in six months to a year. I very faithfully followed their advice until I visited a long-time friend who happened to be an optometrist—one who some insultingly describe as an “eyeglass doctor.”**

**He said very simply, “Let me check your eye,” and concluded that I had an occlusion of my retina—that I had a scar on my retina at the macular.**

**I saw my ophthalmologist. “No. I checked for that possibility.”**

**To make a long story short, the ophthalmologist re-examined me ... and there was a scar.**

**I am not certain whether ingrown toenails are hereditary, but my father suffered from them, and I seem to have inherited the problem on the big toes of both feet. Naturally, I did the normal thing and consulted with an orthopedic specialist, and he prescribed a simple procedure: he yanked out both of my ingrown toenails.**

**However they grew back as ingrown as before.**

**When I went to a podiatrist—a military podiatrist because the military recognizes this subspecialty as part of its health care team—he performed a simple surgery to kill the roots of my toenails. Lo and behold, I have no problems with my toenails to this day.**

**All these specialists are part of the team, and yet in my experience, mighty powers—such as the American Medical Association—have frowned upon or openly opposed the recognition of the expertise of these subspecialties.**

**More than 30 years ago, I concluded that the time had come for nurses to be recognized and granted the privilege of becoming autonomous providers of health care. At that time, nurses were required to be supervised every step of the way.**

**However, I am happy to report that today, 85% of all anesthesia administered to patients is done by nurse anesthetists. Imagine if the laws required the presence of an anesthesiologist in all medical procedures—imagine the impact in rural America and in our tenement zones.**

**In 2002 alone, over 300,000 babies are delivered by nurse midwives. Imagine if gynecologists were required by law to supervise at each birth.**

**The military today has recognized the psychologist as a professional. Their skill is employed and rewarded. But even at this moment, there exists great opposition to their prescribing simple medicines.**

**I could go on and on, but this evolution has convinced me that if all the members of the health care delivery profession could get together and look upon the delivery of health care as team work, then I am certain the cost of health care would become a bit more affordable.**

**We should also make it easier for those who wish to dedicate their lives to this noble profession of tending to the sick and to the injured. Steps should be taken to reduce the cost for students to achieve their dreams. We should make this impossible dream possible for more people.**

**Although we are a super power and a land of plenty, we find ourselves with a dangerous shortage of members on your team: nurses, physicians, optometrists, podiatrists, and so on down the list.**

**Yours is a noble profession that provides comfort, peace, and assurance to humankind. There are those who bless your names each day, but there are still many others who, because of circumstance in life, are denied the greatest treasure: good health. I sincerely believe the number who are being denied can be reduced if the health delivery profession allows all members of its team the privilege and responsibility of providing autonomous care within their specialties.**

**I thank you for the honor of participating in this important chapter of your lives. I wish you all godspeed.**

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