

Good afternoon everyone. I have the honor of welcoming you to the graduation event of MUIH. First, I want to thank Frank Vitale, the executive leadership, administrators and staff for inviting me, even though I am an MD. That was a risk!

And while often, commencement speakers may have little relationship to the graduating class, or the institution itself, it turns out I have several connections here that makes this day special for me personally as well. In fact, in some sense the growth and evolution of the institution parallels my own.

But before I get into that. I want to say how impressed I am by MUIH. The institutional commitment to high quality education is apparent, and the evolution of MUIH into its current status of an accredited University authorized to confer Masters and PhD level degrees in disciplines related to health and wellness is no small feat. In fact, it is almost unheard of.

For that reason, and for many others, this work – your work - is important, and MUIH makes this all possible. They have assembled an expert faculty, designed thoughtful curricula, and execute at the highest levels. I have worked in academia for over 2 decades, and I can tell you that your education is on par with any major academic medical center, and probably better than most.

The resources, expertise, and true care that have been implemented at every level, represent a model and infrastructure of education that is enviable. I say all of this because I want you to be proud of this moment. I want you to be proud of your institution, now your alma mater.

I say this because I know, personally, how many challenges must be overcome to establish an institution such as MUIH, especially given its historical roots, its mission, and the health care climate in which it operates. You are now part of that story, which is just beginning for you.

As many of you know, MUIH has a long history, and used to be called Tai Sophia, a Traditional Chinese Medicine school. It was unique though, in that its core curriculum was based in a particular philosophy called Five Element Theory. Most Chinese Medicine schools eschewed this approach in favor of the more dominant 8 Principles and Yin Yang theories.

And here, I have my first connection to the school. When I was 17 years old, and a new freshman in College in 1990, I was introduced to Tai Chi. It was a course taught by a sophomore, who had been practicing Tai Chi for most of her life.

It was through this class that I was introduced to Shiatsu by the same teacher. She explained to me that it is a Japanese manual therapy using acupressure techniques for health and wellbeing, yet its theoretical foundations were based in Traditional Chinese Medicine.

All I remember of that moment was that I felt like I was struck by lightning. Like something opened up inside of me. And I was changed forever.

I imagine many of you today know exactly what I am talking about. Maybe you have had your own moments, where you felt something well beyond interest or curiosity; but instead an inexorable, compelling force that led you here, to want to learn traditional healing methods, to become a healer of some sort.

So I found a Five Element shiatsu school 20 minutes from my college campus. It was run by a lovely American couple, who had assembled an amazing curriculum. I knew I had to enroll. Years later, I discovered that the woman who started my Shiatsu school graduated from Tai Sophia herself.

Many of my instructors were from Japan and China, along the way. I had a very authentic oriental style education – there was a lot of pointing and hand motions since I did not speak Mandarin or Japanese, and English was not often high on the instructors to do list either.

The training that I received fundamentally changed me. I was expected to meditate, practice Qi Gong, perform art therapy and group work, exercise, cleanse and change my diet. Which was hard to do since I was a college freshman who played rugby.

So it was often detox to retox on the weekends.

I was also not allowed to touch a client, until I developed a stronger sense of my own chi. Instructors would assess me – was I present, peaceful, aware and open? Could I sit next to a client and listen with my hands? Had I diminished my ego in favor of opening my senses. It was all very karate kid. Very wax on, wax off.

I was fascinated by the esoteric nature of the instructions. The ancient chinese secrets that I was learning – how to read a person the minute they walk in a room – how their smell, skin texture, body posture, tongue, pulse, and personality all contribute to an energetic imprint, a pattern essentially, expressed in their symptoms and history.

I am reminded of a quote that I love, from Richard Selzer who was a famous Surgeon Poet from Harvard. He is describing a moment where the personal physician of the Dalai Lama was invited to perform hospital rounds at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.

This was unheard of at the time. And of course, many physicians scoffed at the notion of a voodoo doctor offering anything meaningful.

"His eyes are closed as he feels for the pulse. In a moment he has found the spot, and for the next half hour he remains thus, suspended above the patient like some exotic golden bird with folded wings, holding the pulse of the woman beneath his fingers, cradling her hand in his. All the power of the man seems to be drawn down into this one purpose...And I know that I, who have palpated a hundred thousand pulses, have not felt a single one."

I did not realize at the time what truly powerful lessons I was learning. Or how they would deeply influence my character as well as my professional journey.

I eventually graduated both college and my Shiatsu program, and was a fully formed Five Element practitioner. And essentially wondering – now what? Just like you are, today.

How will I open a practice? How do I run a business? Can I really do this?

I stayed in the Philadelphia area and joined a shiatsu clinic, which was 1994. Early on, many of my clients were professors from the U Penn system; some of whom were implementing outreach programs to poor communities in Philly.

They asked if I would join them. So there I was, teaching meditation, touch therapy and Qi Gong in Churches and Barber Shops in underserved areas, combining basic primary care outreach with traditional healing arts.

We also worked to connect regional farmers into the communities, develop a network of lay health advocates, and transfer traditional healing knowledge to key stakeholders.

And, as a result, I saw people transform. I saw a community transform. And at the core of this work was a spiritual morality grounded in an effort to teach people how to better care for themselves and each other.

I saw first hand the power of integrating conventional and traditional healing methods. I also saw the power of social connections, finding meaning and purpose in ones life, and the role of healthy nutrition, movement and self care methods can play, in what was supposed to be the sickest of the sick. The non-compliers. The at risk groups who lacked access to medical care.

I saw the impossible. I witnessed a miracle. And I had a glimpse into the future of what medicine should be, what it should have always been.

But how did we get here? Why has there been such a divide between the CAM and conventional community?

The needless suffering I saw, many years ago in that neighborhood was a result of many socioeconomic and cultural forces, to be sure. But it was also an expression of a rift we have in our health care system, a gap between traditional

therapies and conventional biomedicine that was unfortunately purposefully created.

To understand this issue, we have to go back further in time, when an artificial split was rendered in the health care landscape, in the United States in 1910. This was called the Flexner report.

Beginning in 1904, a gentleman named Abraham Flexner was asked to conduct a review of all medical education in the US by the AMA and federal government. At the time, there were many health professionals and schools that dotted the landscape.

In 1800: 200 graduates of medical schools (Regulars)

Early 1800s, amazing pluralistic landscape, which was an organized opposition to orthodoxy (Irregulars)

- Thomsonians – botanical healing
- Grahamites – health food
- Homeopaths – microdilution medicine
- Hydropaths – water-cure therapies
- Mesmerists

1847: American Medical Association founded to erect political, cultural and financial barricade

- Anti-sectarian consultation clause
- Committee on Quackery

1910:

155 medical schools present

Recommendations based upon Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine

- 907 women medical students in 1910, only 592 existed in 1915

- Seven black medical schools operated prior to 1910, only two remained after the report
- 130 laws passed regulating at least 14 health related occupations
- 76 medical schools existed (1935)
- Waning medical care provided to minorities and underserved became the norm

Consequences of the Flexner Report

- Standardized medical education
- Linked AMA politically and financially to state-based regulation and licensure
- Formally tied medical science to standard of care
- Increased cost of medical education
- Small 'proprietary' schools vanished, eliminating training for women, African Americans, and applicants with limited means
- Drove underground the 'irregulars' such as naturopaths, herbalists, homeopaths

So what are we talking about here, really? Yes it was clearly a marketplace and professional play for primacy. And certainly we are the only country in the world with such a before and after moment. Where the natural mingling of the old and new was so thoroughly unmixed and separated.

We are still suffering the echoes of the Flexner report. The poor communities I used to work in did not have access to traditional healing approaches; and yet it is a human birthright. How we breathe, touch and move; what we eat; how we are able to harness the power of our consciousness and emotions; even our knowledge of the plant world and the healing power that botanicals can offer.

On a deeper level, this is a conversation and debate that goes back hundreds of years. The traditional healing systems were grounded in a vitalist notion that the world is energized by a hidden force that we can access, assess and influence. That all illness arises from an imbalance, first, in this energy field, and if left unchecked, will lead to physical organic illness.

From Vitalism to Materialism

- William Harvey demonstrates blood circulation (1616)
- Francis Bacon 'De augmentis scientiarum' – development of scientific method (1623)
- Santorio measure body temperature (1625)
- 17th century Descartes splits mind from body.
- Materialism became ascendant rapidly between 17th and 20th century
- Success of germ theory, vaccinations, and public health measures became hallmarks of scientific discovery and supremacy

Scientific Materialism

- Quantitative
- Inductive
- Objective
- Material
- Reductive
- Abstract
- Problem focus

As a consequence, Medicine solidified its identity into the notion of Scientific materialism based on a currency of measurable objectivity and statistical norms. We also organized how we identify doctors based on body systems and specialty care.

We cut up nature, and by extension the body, into further and further subunits because of an implicit agreement that this is how we can better come to know the world around us. It is embedded in the psychology of our language, in our historical and cultural roots, and defines our collective epistemology, or in other words how we come to gain new knowledge.

So, the cardiologists got the heart. Gastroenterologists the GI tract. Neurologists the nervous system. And so on. And we based the authority of the medical model on the premise that we can use technology and science to peer ever more deeply into the recesses of the human body. To measure things we can't see or observe. And the model works, to some degree.

And medicine came into ascendancy as these other approaches and ideas were driven underground and out of sight. But we lost or discarded more than just the technologies of acupuncture needles (yes, the first description of acupuncture is cited in a Civil War surgeon field journal), herbs, homeopathic remedies and such.

But more so, we repressed and ignored the powerful lessons of a vitalist world view – that we are all connected, that our mind and spirit matter too, that what is objectively measurable is only part of the human experience, and that we are more than our blood, bones and viscera.

So the Flexner report drove underground healers and healing methods for years. They were labeled as quacks, marginalized, and became the subject of its own form of scientific bigotry.

It was not until the

1960s: Grassroots Movements Reinvigorate Vitalism

- Women's Movement
 - Reclaim power over body
 - Reaction to medical care
 - Natural child birth and home births
- Anti-War Movement
 - Peace as a political statement
- Holistic Health
 - AHMA established
 - Popularization of Eastern practices
 - Social experimentation: living arrangements, relationships, psychedelic drugs

And now fast forward another 50 years to today. The landscape has changed again. And certainly in your favor. The public has continued to invest themselves in the cultural idea of health and wellness to the tune of 1 trillion dollars yearly.

Over 60 academic medical centers harbor integrative medicine programs, and now, for the first time a Board of Integrative Medicine exists for physicians. It is now its own formal recognized specialty.

So what happened? How did this happen? Well, for many reasons, but mostly because of individual and collective efforts, enough was enough. The fracture that was created by the Flexner Report is starting to heal because of places like MUIH.

Look around – your school is an accredited University that teaches the Vitalist healing traditions. But at the same time, there is a strong emphasis on science and the evidence base for these practices.

Your education represents the next evolution in the healing arts. It is not always a comfortable or easy marriage. There are many issues yet to be resolved and solved in terms of creating and defining what the new medicine will look like.

But make no mistake, there is no turning back from this path now. A resolution and reintegration of traditional and contemporary, old and new, vitalist and scientific materialist.

Your efforts at MUIH, in my estimation are far more important than maybe even you realize. You are part of a long story, maybe one of the most important in the human experience.

How do we see ourselves? How do we view health and illness? Where does suffering come from and what are the best ways to alleviate suffering?

Do we see the human body like a machine with levers, pulleys and replaceable parts; or like a plant or ecosystem, connected within itself and to the external world around us?

I think both models are right. As a physician, I recognize sometimes we need pharmaceuticals and surgery. I have seen too many miracles performed by excellent physicians to ignore the power of conventional medicine. When a person is in extremis, or needs to be quickly pulled back from the clinical precipice, there is no better model than scientific materialism.

But, I have also witnessed extraordinary healing using the softer approaches, where we nourish the spirit, reaffirm the role of consciousness, allow for touch, movement, breath; and create space for whole foods diet, botanicals, supplements and natural remedies.

Interestingly, conventional medicine is at a cross roads. If we are really honest, when you look at the burden of chronic illness, directly related to lifestyle choices, stress, exposures, nutritional deficiencies and more, it is clear that the current medical model of silo based care is inadequate to the challenge.

No more can the cardiologist just think about the blood vessels and heart. Or the neurologist the nervous system.

To best understand how the body organizes itself around these challenges and pressures we experience now daily, it requires a fundamental reframing of our physiology.

And so we have a new discipline in medicine called systems biology, which attempts to reconnect the dots that we so efficiently separated. How the brain talks to the gut, and to the heart; or how the gut interacts with the immune system or nervous system.

What is interesting is that this new emphasis moves us away from discrete diagnoses and into evaluating models of metabolic changes. In other words, pattern analysis.

So the intellectual gap is now closing between what has been observed by healers around the world for thousands of years – patterns of illness expression – and now a biological explanatory framework that can demonstrate the measurable underpinnings of these phenomena.

So at every level, these worlds are coming closer and closer together. So what does this mean for you?

It means, today, you are now a healer and trained in your respective discipline. But you are also a leading edge of change

in medicine. Your clients and patients will expect a lot from you. They will raise issues and ask questions of you that they won't ask of their doctor. And they will want you to assume the bearing and mantle of a healer, but also expect you to have command of the science as well.

I promise you, they are out there googling their condition right now and will be bringing in stacks of information, tests and failed treatments.

And they will want your guidance, support and care because it is hard for them to obtain it anywhere else. I admit the health care system is flawed, deeply in some cases, and unfortunately broken in others.

It will be your job to help heal the divide, to care for your patients, but also be ambassadors for change. I believe the fully formed professional will have to not only master their clinical art, but also continue to lessen the many divides that now exist in health care.

This may be a bigger task than you were bargaining for. You may be sitting there thinking I just want to insert some needles or recommend the Paleo diet and get on with it.

But I see your role no different than mine. You keep advocating for your profession because you will see those miracles. You have learned how to be present, aware and peaceful – maybe the most powerful clinical tool you can bring to bear, and it's a skill I did not learn in medical school; you have embraced the traditional methods, but not rejected science either.

Do not waste this moment. You have gained the skills and knowledge to help individuals on many levels, but you are also

entering a confused and complicated health care landscape that desperately needs you.

It needs your thoughtfulness and compassion; it needs your bravery that you rejected the norm and asked what else is there? Drugs and surgery can't be the only answer. But the system also needs your participation and advocacy for change.

Gather patient stories. Look for opportunities to collect data and publish research. There is a huge gap between what we observe in our healing practices and what has been codified, analyzed and published in the scientific literature.

While the public has done its part to demand our services, we need to, in turn use our position to continue to improve health care in this country. Many of the answers to heart disease, diabetes, cancer, stress, auto immune illnesses, and many more sit in this room today.

You will be in awe of what you can accomplish with your patients. And I hope you do not operate in the shadows, but practice confidently in the light of day.

Through collaboration and thoughtful discourse, and most importantly improved patient outcomes, you will lessen the divides, and heal people and our health care system.

So I will leave you with some final thoughts, and allow you to get on with your important day.

1. Do not forget to love yourself first
2. Be present for your patients
3. Never stop learning

4. Embrace your personal and professional growth, even when difficult. That's why it's called growing pains.
5. Compassion and empathy are the two most powerful healing tools you have at your disposal
6. Give thanks to those who came before you, and find ways to give back

In conclusion, I am very proud of your accomplishments and wish you all the best in the next phase of your journey. I know you are well prepared to meet the challenges ahead and look forward to hearing about all of the amazing things you will accomplish in the future.

Thank you.