

Transcript for Chancellor Collins' Podcast – Published on Sept. 20, 2023

Chancellor Collins looks ahead to a vibrant year at UMass Chan

Chancellor Michael F. Collins kicked off the first episode of a new Voices of UMass Chan podcast season days after he welcomed UMass Chan Medical School's largest medical school class in history. In the podcast, Collins sheds light on UMass Chan's milestones and its pursuit of excellence as the community advances together.

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Thanks you for listening to the Voices of UMass Chan, featuring the people, ideas and advances of UMass Chan Medical School.

An audio recording of Chancellor Michael F. Collins speaking to the new T.H. Chan School of Medicine Class at UMass Chan Medical School

On this first day of medical school, as the person who has the wonderful opportunity to lead this institution, it's such a privilege for me to be able to stand here, and welcome you, as my most junior colleagues, welcome to you.

Jennifer Berryman

It's the *Voices of UMass Chan* podcast. And we are kicking it off once again, season number six with Chancellor Michael F. Collins, welcome.

Chancellor Michael F. Collins

Thank you always great to be here, particularly at the beginning of a new academic year.

Jennifer Berryman

It's always such a good time to touch base. And we do try to do that with you as we're welcoming a new class of students just a moment ago, we heard just an excerpt of your first lecture that you give to the incoming class of the TH Chan School of Medicine.

Jennifer Berryman

And here, this is really a milestone year, the largest School of Medicine class ever.

Chancellor Michael F. Collins

Pretty exciting. We have 200 first-year medical students, nine MD PhDs. Within that group, 120 are from Massachusetts and 80 from out of state. One of the things we were very concerned about when we

began to take out-of-state students is that we would not disenfranchise any Massachusetts student who wanted a spot. So we've always kept that.

Chancellor Michael F. Collins

That's right, two thirds of the class is from Massachusetts. But I will tell you that you have the chance to give the first lecture to the medical students. And it's always a sort of anxiety provoking, I get excited to be there on the first day.

Jennifer Berryman

Do you get first day jitters?

Chancellor Michael F. Collins

Oh, very much. So, I hope it's not apparent for the class. But absolutely and, and I spent a lot of time on the weekend thinking about, you know, being prepared, being excited, and then sort of trying to communicate what I want to say to them, which is that they should really recognize the privilege it is to be a doctor.

Chancellor Michael F. Collins speaking to the new T.H. Chan School of Medicine Class of 2027 at UMass Chan Medical School

You're one of the, if not the, most accomplished medical school class in the world that will get in here.

MUSIC

Chancellor Michael F. Collins

In recognizing that personal accomplishment, and the privilege it is to recognize that it's so important in each and every interaction with a patient, that we hold that patient in esteem, that we promote their human dignity. And that most importantly, we recognize that maybe one of the most important things we'll do in our career is hold a patient's hand. And that's sort of the message I deliver on day one.

Jennifer Berryman

And you talk about how special it is for these students. Each one in their family now takes on this new role as a future physician, and the class is so selective 5000 applicants and it all comes down to these 200, who I just thought this was a great stat they speak 40 languages, among them.

Chancellor Michael F. Collins

It's incredible. You're quite right, I actually get a chance to speak to the parents in the afternoon. I can't imagine what it would have been like for my mom to come to my first day of medical school. But anyway,

so that's a different it's a different world. And I do mention that fact that the relationship that a family member has with their child once they come into medical school changes forever now, maybe not on day one, but I guarantee you by Thanksgiving, the stethoscopes will be out and everybody around the table will be having their heart listened to that parents and other members of the family will be calling to talk about this pain or that diagnosis and then over time, particularly once a person wants to medical student graduates do their residency, their relationship becomes Yes, it's always son and daughter but it is now a doctor and they become an important caregiver for their own family

Jennifer Berryman

And so knowledgeable. And you might say the same thing for the incoming class at the Tan Chingfen Graduate School of Nursing. Sixty-three new students are joining us now 93 new students in the Morningside Graduate School of biomedical sciences. These classes are all growing. Can you talk about why that is?

Chancellor Michael F. Collins

Well, I think it's certainly clear in the health professions that we need more practitioners, the nursing shortage is real. It's perceptible it's very difficult for the health systems affiliated with the medical school now to hire enough nurses and nursing students that we educate those students that we have the privilege to steward their education have all received an undergraduate degree So they might have a music degree from a great undergraduate liberal arts school, but then they decide they want to go into nursing short time thereafter. And so, they're very motivated, very focused, very accomplished students, by the way, who then come in and want to pursue a career in nursing, get a master's or a doctorate. And the students who are in our graduate school, same thing, as the research enterprise here grows, there's a greater need for graduate students. And I think one of the things that's been particularly interesting over the last few years is the interface between science in industry in science and academia. I would say, in my earliest years, at UMass Chan, students who were completing their PhD in graduate school are by and large, going into academic positions, you know, doing postdocs, and working in an academic laboratory. Now, there's certainly a much greater number who are actually going into industry and utilizing the talents and the education that they've received here. Now to go and make some of these discoveries that are really changing the face of medicine.

Jennifer Berryman

That's right, there's just so many options for all of our graduates really. And even when it comes to the educational piece, it's interesting. Take our medical students, for instance, so if you're an incoming medical student, you can really almost customize your MD degree what whether it's a certain pathway

or focus of study, or maybe you're doing an accelerated MD or you're at one of our two regional campuses. Why is that choice important For future caregivers?

Chancellor Michael F. Collins

I like to say that medicine is a profession of professions. It's interesting to sort of watch the evolution in the mind of a student to sort of the determination of a student around specialty choice and practice type. Over the course of their, their time with us. There are a few students who come and say, I'm going to be this a neurosurgeon, orthopedic surgeon, and internist, a geriatrician on day one who do that. And there are many who come and I will describe medical school is sort of going to the banquet table of medicine. And I don't think you should just have the, you know, the pasta salad or the, or the roast beef or the lobster. I think you should try the things and then and that, in many ways, is what medical school is where you have an opportunity to, to experience all the professions, all the practice types, and then make a decision. And it's fascinating for me to see the student walk in and say, "Oh, I'm going to do this." And I say, "Okay, well, where did that come from?" And but it's, honestly, it's very atypical at the beginning of the medical school. I have lunch with all the first-year students, and we talk about, you know, what is it you think you're going to do? And many will say, "Oh, you know, I've worked at this institution for the last several years, and I've done cancer research. And, you know, I sort of have an interest in that, or, you know, I work in a dermatology practice, and, you know, I'm thinking maybe I would like to dermatology." And then to kind of watch the evolution over the four years, when they actually make that specialty decision at the end of the third beginning of the fourth year. And then to have a conversation about why they did what it did. And oftentimes it will be the interaction they have with a particular patient or a group of patients. Sometimes it's the practice style, is it more shift work, versus wanting to look after a panel of patients? Is it? Well, I've just, you know, solidified my love of children, and therefore, I want to be into pediatrics, or I've always had a commitment to be a primary care internist, looking after an elderly population in my hometown, and as those realities become firmer in the mind of the medical student, then they make your specialty choice, and they're off to the races for the residency,

Jennifer Berryman

How great is it that they have so many options, right? I mean, really, sky's the limit.

Chancellor Michael F. Collins

So many therapeutic options now that didn't exist. And, you know, back to my first lecture, I say that, you know, HIV wasn't even a disease when I graduated from medical school, I don't really feel that old. And so, another tenant of their educational reality is that they've now entered a career long commitment to

education. And, and so he's quite right, there's so many different options for them and so many different therapeutic opportunities that are made available from, you know, the very technical aspects of, of surgical procedures through to the very cognitive aspects of complicated diagnoses to the very technologically specific of radiology or radiation oncology. It's just provides students with such a broad array of choices.

Jennifer Berryman

Is there any way in which you would say, medical students have changed over the last generation or so?

Chancellor Michael F. Collins

One difference I would say is that many more of us went straight to medical school from college 40 years ago than today. Now, it's much more like business school where students have done a lot. They've been out two, three, four years, and come to medical school with a much different appreciation. In fact, it's quite interesting at some of these lunches, where a student who has just graduated from medical school would say is roughly around a third of the class or less than that. And someone who's been out six or seven years was like, "Oh, I've got to learn how to study again," versus the other student will say, "Well, you know, studying is no big deal. I've been doing that, you know, all along." So, I would say that's older, I'm constantly encouraged by the idealism that I see. And I'm grateful for that. To me, it's wonderful to be in a profession, where young people come with an idealism, a commitment really to others and not to self you, we have to recognize that our livelihoods is made on the illness and the challenge of others. And sometimes the balance there is very complicated, it's very complex. And so, we have to recognize that and if this class if the accomplishment of people who were these accomplished went into most any other discipline, profession, finance world, they would be wildly successful, given their intellectual ability. But they choose to commit to a lifelong service to others. And that, to me, is extremely refreshing.

MUSIC

An audio recording of Chancellor Michael F. Collins speaking to the new T.H. Chan School of Medicine Class at UMass Chan Medical School

In this very place, right upstairs, scientists are looking at RNA interference, and how it might actually help to cure a disease. Our Dean is looking at how he can actually deliver correct genetic material to a child in order to cure Tay-Sachs disease. The new building that we're building next door is going to have a focus on single gene defect diseases.

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Jennifer Berryman

It's great to have the vibrancy of all the students back on campus again, and there is a ton going on around this campus. So, I want to talk now a little bit about the new research and education building that's going up. From the outside, it looks like it's finished. But obviously, there's still a lot of construction equipment here. So, tell us about that.

Chancellor Michael F. Collins

So, we're opening right after the first of the year, a new 350,000 square foot Education Research Building, costing about \$350 million dollars. It's a very, very large project. I'm very proud to say that our team is bringing the building in on time and on budget, which is very unusual in this inflation-plagued world we've lived in the last couple of years. We'll be housing 77 principal investigators in the building, 55 of whom will be new, they won't all the new faculty won't go into that building. But as we shuffle people around from other departments that will open spaces, so we will actually be recruiting over time 55 new faculty members. We have a focus in the building around the challenge of single gene defect diseases. And, so we'll have our gene therapy and research team are all neuroscience research, neurology, neurosurgery, neurobiology, and our molecular medicine teams. And we do have some space in there also, for a new department of human genetics and evolutionary biology. It speaks to the vibrancy of an institution like ours, that we're building a new building. And I can tell you that in the recruiting that we're doing, the folks that we're attracting to the campus. When we open a position now we see literally the top five people in the world, and we're able to recruit them here and many common feel that sort of vibrant, you know, ping that you receive when there's a new building coming on board. And so, there is as we kind of sit and look out at the green and recognize that, you know, this new structure that will complete the green will be opened by the end of this academic year, open and occupied by the end of the academic year. It does bring a certain vibrancy to the campus.

Jennifer Berryman

It's just a matter of days at this point your months for sure, more like it. But you mentioned that it says something about the campus. I think when you're trying to attract somebody that there is this new building and this new investment in research, and you've made me think of something you know. We just recently launched this new tagline called advancing together and one of the examples was this new faculty member who literally could have gone anywhere in the world, chose to come here to UMass Chan. And already with three dozen other labs, she's collaborating and sharing her technology and I think that it's nice that people are seeing it. Right, people see it, they feel it. What is it that what's the how do you define it?

Chancellor Michael F. Collins

Yeah, in every way, it's the secret sauce of the place. There is a collaboration gene here, which is dominant and fully expressed that people are for our science or just, they just feel it. And you know, a lot of science is kind of the closed arm. I'm working on something in my lab, and I get my PhD or I get my publication by, you know, sort of keeping that under wraps until it's finalized. And then I publish it. And I don't really think that's the, that's the case here. I think there is a collaborative spirit. There's, a willingness to work together. The notion of advancing together is sort of inculcated throughout the institution. And if you're not really interested in that, there's plenty of places you can go where that's not the case. But the case here, and I hear it over and over and over again. And I hear it if you if you talk to a new faculty member, after they've been here, or invite them to have dinner with a donor or someone and they talk about, "Okay, well, why did you come to UMass Chan, you could have gone you could have gone anywhere in the world?" They say they came here because they felt that the collaborative nature collaborative and collegial nature of the place. And, and they want to be part of it. And, and so we're, we're now thinking about, we spent a lot of time thinking about sort of what we do and what we are. And frankly, in every way, we're advancing together, whether it's advancing medicine together, or nursing together, or science together, we're whether it's advancing together, in partnership with our philanthropists, whether it's advancing the careers of people who choose to come here, whether their staff or faculty, whether it's advancing the future of learners. And we're going to do throughout the course of the year is celebrate that and communicate it so that others recognize that there really is something special about humanity. And you know, last year, we were selected as one of the best places to work in Massachusetts by the *The Boston Globe*. And you know, we're in the mix again this year for that. And you know, that to me was a very, that was a very important recognition, because that is that is determined by our employees who say, you know, that's how we feel about the place. When we were the only academic institution in Massachusetts to receive such a designation. I think that says something special about the place and the people who are here every day.

Jennifer Berryman

So, I just want to wrap up by You sound pretty bullish on the medical school, which maybe people would expect as the leader and the person who has been executing this vision, but what excites you? What gets you out of bed in the morning? And what are the challenges that you see on your doorstep?

Chancellor Michael F. Collins

Well, the excitement is to be in such a terrifically vibrant environment, to meet new young learners and two, by the way, have the professional responsibility for stewarding their education. That's pretty exciting to be able to attract these outstanding scientists and staff from all over the world. And am I bullish on the place, I sure am. Because I recognize now, throughout the Commonwealth, throughout the nation and throughout the world, UMass Chan Medical School now has a there's a much greater appreciation of what's being accomplished here. And, and people want to help us and there's a great desire for us to succeed. You know, we're part of a great university system with four other universities. I'm pretty bullish on the value proposition that is UMass at the moment. Being part of that is really pretty exciting. And having the opportunity to partner with the other four institutions is great. So what am I concerned about? Well in my role and responsibility is really to provide the resources so that we can continue to do all the things we want to do. You know, we're fortunate, we have substantial resources. We have great partnerships. You mentioned earlier that we have incredible affiliates, where we now have two regional campuses, which has allowed our classes size and medicine to grow. But we continue to need resources in order to fulfill the mission. Our mission really is to change the course of history of disease. It is to be present in our communities. It's to steward the education of learners. It is to foster the accomplishments of faculty. It is to recognize the contributions of staff and in order to do that in a capital-intensive place like a medical school, you need resources. So, I spend a lot of my time talking to people about the resources needed in order to succeed, and the resources that in partnership, if we were to receive more, we could actually do a better job of advancing together. If I were an investor, UMass Chan is the place to invest at the moment, because in every way, we're advancing together.

Jennifer Berryman

Chancellor Michael Collins, thank you so much for making time for us like you always do.

Chancellor Michael F. Collins

It's always great to be together, particularly the beginning of the year, thank you.

Music**Chancellor Michael F. Collins speaking to the new T.H. Chan School of Medicine Class of 2027 at UMass Chan Medical School**

Always hold the hand of your patient with esteem. Because for us, it's a privilege to care for our patients. Not a privilege for our patients to be cared for by us.

Voice over artist

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Music

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