



## THE CLASS OF 2024 WRITES ITS OWN OATH

BY KAYLA PAPAKIE

**I**n July, incoming Pitt Med students received an email with one of their first assignments: Write a class oath.

More than 40 hours of video-chat discussions later, the students had a working draft.

Chenits Pettigrew, an EdD who is associate dean for diversity, equity and inclusion at the School of Medicine, says, “It is really important that the students begin to understand what they’re taking on and what a privilege it is to be let into the intimate spaces of people’s lives.

“These are students who come from all different places and backgrounds. This exercise helped them identify their similarities and differences and then apply those discussions to one very important experience that they will be sharing together.”

The Class of 2024 upheld the tradition of reciting the Hippocratic Oath at their virtual White Coat Ceremony on Aug. 16, 2020; yet, says first-year Nathalie Chen, an update was in order: “Patients are no longer viewed just in terms of their symptoms and sicknesses. Physicians now seek to understand each patient’s narrative and how their socioeconomic status may impact their health,” she says.

All 149 incoming students helped draft the oath. (They initially met in groups of five.)

“We worked collaboratively but disagreed at times,” says Tito Onyekweli, who, with Chen and others, served on the committee that

finalized the oath. “We brought up topics that were triggering for some but did not push the status quo enough for others. We were diverse in the most collective sense. More than anything, this process was human.”

In their “Oath of Professionalism,” the students pledge to work toward restoring trust in providers among disenfranchised people. They also commit to championing diversity in medicine and society and to stand as allies to those of low socioeconomic status.

“We start our medical journey amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and a national civil rights movement reinvigorated by the killings of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery,” the oath begins. “We honor the 700,000-plus lives lost to COVID-19, despite the sacrifices of health care workers.”

At the end of their orientation week in August, students officially presented their oath to Anantha Shekhar, an MD, PhD, senior vice chancellor for the health sciences and John and Gertrude Petersen Dean of the School of Medicine. “I am excited to watch them put this promise into practice,” says Shekhar.

Moving forward, each incoming Pitt Med class will write its own oath, says Pettigrew: “This exercise solidified the class in a way I’ve never seen before. We will do it again.”

Read the whole oath here: [pi.tt/pittoath2024](https://pi.tt/pittoath2024)