

George A. O. Alleyne
Chancellor
University of the West Indies
November 19, 2010

**Of alumni as we are and memories of the way we were
Bridgetown, Barbados***

Ladies and gentlemen, let me also welcome you to this banquet of the Tenth Reunion of the Medical Alumni Association of the University of the West Indies, and I also wish to thank Mike Hoyos for giving me the honor and pleasure of speaking to you tonight. Let me congratulate you Mike on a splendid reunion! In so many of my public speeches I am constrained by the audience or the occasion, but at times like these, among persons who share so much with me, I think I can speak more freely and perhaps tell stories that I cannot usually tell. I wish to recognize two special people-Lancy Bannister a one of the first Medical graduates and John Whittingham one of the first Science graduates! I also wish to recognize two members of my own class of 1957-Knox Hagley and James Ling. We are proud that we talked more, argued more, feted more and married more nurses than any other class before or since!! We followed the dictum that I have enunciated before. When men are young they need lovers, in their middle years they need friends, and when the shadows lengthen and other things shorten, they need nurses. We know how to get all three in one!

At one of the early Alumni Reunions in Jamaica as Ernest and Lincoln Hew will recall, I was rather sentimental in referring to the Mission of San Juan Capistrano and compared our coming to reunions here in the Caribbean to the return of the swallows to Capistrano. I still feel the same way and regard these meetings as occasions for renewal of commitment and renewal of friendships we formed when we were young. I believe as an unknown author said *"Friendship is like a violin; the music may stop now and then, but the strings will last forever"*. So it is with a feeling of dread and almost panic that I heard comments about this possibly being our last Reunion, as there is no longer interest of the younger among us. What will history say of us if there is no place for the swallows to hear the mission bells of their Caribbean Capistrano? And if I can be grandiloquent let me paraphrase and plagiarize Lyndon B. Johnson:

"Today, in this moment of new resolve, I would say to all my fellow alumni, let us continue. This is our challenge-not to hesitate, not to pause, not to turn about and linger, but to continue with our reunions."

* Presented at the Tenth International Scientific & Reunion Conference of the UWI Medical Alumni Association (UWIMAA), Bridgetown, Barbados, November 19, 2010

The theme of this reunion is Health and Development: the role of the University and the Alumni. This struck a chord in me as at the last alumni reunion, thanks to Henry Fraser I launched my book with the title "Health and Development in our Time". I could easily devote the time allotted to me tonight to giving a mini course on the essential arguments of the book, but I will not, as I am sure that those of you who bought it have read and understand it. I could open the argument about development as capabilities as argued by the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen and explore the central and critical role of a University in expanding these capabilities.

I could discuss the evolving concepts of human development and tell you beware the economists who would have you believe that they own development and that development and economic growth are one and the same thing. That of course is not true and you will tell them that it is human development that is our holy grail. It is the flowering of the human condition that we are after and health is one of the essential pillars on which that human development rests. Much of what we have heard in the past three days strengthens this view. You can also quote to them our first Vice-Chancellor Sir Arthur Lewis who propounded the thesis that wealth was not important in and of itself; its main value was that it allowed for expansion of human choice.

If you are grounded in the history of economics or have read the relevant part of my book, you will confront the economists with the fact that one of the fathers of their discipline was one of us, a physician-Sir William Petty who was one of the founders of the Royal Society. He traveled to Ireland with Oliver Cromwell and was given the contract for charting and dividing up that country. Like a good physician he charted 30,000 acres to himself. He is credited with the development of political arithmetic-the forerunner of modern economics.

But tonight, since you have heard many learned discourses over the past three days, I would prefer to be a bit lighter and speak rather of the health and development of the University, the Faculty of Medical Sciences and the Medical Alumni Association-what is your or rather our role and part in them. But I can do that only by drawing on the memories which must be a part of any gathering of this nature. This is a time when the old goats get together and reminisce and the young kids look askance at them, not yet appreciating that they too will grow beards and walk more slowly. It was Dostoyevsky who said:

"There is nothing higher and stronger and more wholesome and useful for life in later years than some good memory, especially a memory connected with childhood, with home."

The home for us in this case is our alma mater and indeed we were as children then. Or as another author put it: *"Memories are the treasures that we keep locked deep within the storehouse of our souls, to keep our hearts warm when we are lonely"*. And the musical among you will hum along with Barbara Streisand

*"M-M-M-M-Mem'ries light the corners of my mind
Misty water-colored mem'ries of the way we were"*

*Mem'ries may be beautiful and yet
What's too painful to remember we simply choose to forget
So it's the laughter we will remember
Whenever we remember the way we were. "*

Much of the laughter will indeed be related to incidents of our companions- don't let us forget the nurses-and our teachers and I have fond memories and tales of both! The older ones among us –at least the men- will have memories of the way they were in the days before they relied on the little blue or yellow pills instead of the little brown jug. We should be grateful for pills, not only because of the pharmaceutical companies which support this reunion, but be glad that we are not in the kind of home for the retired in which the little blue pills played a role not described for them by the Food and Drug Administration.

At every graduation, I encourage the young graduates to be active members of their Alumni Associations. Because Chancellors cannot be biased, I cannot tell them that the Medical Alumni Association is the oldest and best of the alumni associations, because once I was severely chastised for saying with pride that “we is we and after we is weevils”. If you agree with me, say –Amen!

I should tell them however that there are two kinds of alumni. There are those who forget the University or pretend that they are too busy to pay attention or homage to the place that begat them and too busy to ground with the companions who supported them. They make excuses and give the responses not quite as pathetic as St. Luke in his gospel has one man giving when asked to supper “ I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come” Poor fellow! There are others hopefully like ourselves who carry the University and the Faculty with us no matter how far we roam or how high we fly. Those of you who have soared like eagles know that it is the wind from the wings of the Pelican that allowed you to begin your ascent.

I spoke of commitment and we have among us many examples of fidelity and commitment to our Association. In this context, let me welcome and congratulate Audre Spence for her enthusiasm, energy and commitment not only in organizing this reunion, but for bringing some new ideas to us. I like especially our new website and urge you all to visit it, and please give it content. How good it is to learn of recent events and to see so many of our fellow alumni being recognized and lauded for excellence in various fields. When we read of them we bask in their reflected glory and say with pride that we knew them. I know that it will be easier for the young to enter the website and with their facility for computers and social communication make more use of the information than I can. I confess that I still have a lurking suspicion of computers although I know that through them we have revolutionized medicine and the interconnectedness that they provide is the basis for the acceleration of the globalization that touches everything we do.

Speaking of computers, I found this comment on them in Google. A Spanish teacher was explaining to her class that in Spanish, unlike English, nouns are designated as either masculine or feminine. A student asked, “What gender is computer”? Instead

of giving the answer, the teacher split the class into two groups, male and female, and asked them to decide for themselves whether computer should be a masculine or a feminine noun. Each group was asked to give four reasons for its recommendation.

The men's group decided that computer should definitely be of the feminine gender (la computadora), because

1. No one but their creator understands their internal logic;
2. The native language they use to communicate with other computers is incomprehensible to everyone else;
3. Even the smallest mistakes are stored in long term memory for possible later retrieval; and
4. As soon as you make a commitment to one, you find yourself spending half your paycheck on accessories for it.

The women's group, however, concluded that computers should be Masculine (el computador) because:

1. In order to do anything with them, you have to turn them on;
2. They have a lot of data but still can't think for themselves;
3. They are supposed to help you solve problems, but half the time they are the problem; and
4. As soon as you commit to one, you realize that if you had waited a little longer, you could have gotten a better model.

The women won!

But finally, what about the health and development of the University and the Faculty? Every year for our graduation ceremonies, I get the opportunity to review the state of the University as regards our graduates and programs and the development has been impressive across all faculties. But let me say how pleased I was to confer on two of our alumni the degrees of Doctor of Science (Honoris Causa). Many of us have memories of a small residential institution and find it difficult to grasp that there is now a 4th Campus-the Open Campus and our total student population is 44,000. The Faculty of Medicine is spread over three campuses and has 3 Deans, but I am pleased that it has a single University Dean. There is no shortage of qualified applicants to the Faculty and the possibility or reality of incorporating full fee-paying students has enhanced our viability and possibility for further development. I continue to note a steady stream of graduates from the postgraduate programs. In spite of the economic problems, I have no fear for the continuity of the University and the quality of our

product as our vigilant Quality Assurance Unit takes care of this. I have been assured that our students are still grounded in the art of medicine.

Do alumni and especially medical alumni have a role? Of course they do. But I believe that we need some more ingenious and innovative ways of tapping our potential. I also believe that with our numbers and the length of our history, although it is relatively short, our financial contributions could be greater. Some alumni associations involve themselves in supporting liaisons between society and the university and it is interesting to note that in some cases the alumni opine on the courses of study as they are in a good position to know the needs of the market. One area which is growing in importance and in which we could be formally involved is that of mentoring students and recent graduates which is now possible via the internet and does not need the physical presence. But another role which could be very important and could be played through our website is that of sharing some of the traditions, heritage and history of the institution. There is one thing I have found that is critical for involving members of an association is to be specific in the requests one makes. General statements about persons not being involved get nowhere and let us remember that plurality of loyalties is normal but let me hasten to add except in marriage.

But this week and tonight is a time for our profession and our alumni to celebrate, so I was taken recently by a quotation about the needs of a good profession like ours.

“Every profession is a jealous mistress and requires the best thought and time of her votary, but she is also a wise mistress and knows that attentions to her are fresher and brighter if her lover takes recreations and vacations.”

Of course none of you know anything about mistresses, but let this be our time of recreation and vacation. And as we burnish the memories of the way we were, let me leave you with a mix of nostrums given to me by wise men and women over the years.

Especially after the age of 65, there are some things that you must never do.

Never pass the last bathroom before the boarding gate in an airport.
Never take for granted that it is only wind you are about to break
Never take a sleeping pill and a laxative on the same night.

I wish you well; I wish you many happy memories.
May the light keep shining from the west!
May the Faculty of medical Sciences continue to put oil in the lamp!
May the UWI Medical Alumni Association continue to grow and flourish!
And as they say in Edinburgh:

Floreat medica res! May things medical flourish!