



## Bellwether Magazine

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# Commencement Address by Claire M. Fagin, M.A., Ph.D.

Claire M. Fagin  
*University of Pennsylvania*

## School Honors Dr. Fagin

*Commencement Address by  
Claire M. Fagin, M.A.,  
Ph.D.*

Congratulations colleagues and let me add my personal congratulations to you and everyone who has helped sustain you and encourage you as you have pursued this important degree. It's a thrill to be here with you today, and with so many of my colleagues on your faculty, as we celebrate you and the last graduation of the 20th century.

You have chosen this profession at a particularly interesting time and that choice tells us a great deal about you. You know that you have not made an easy choice for your future and that the rewards, both financial and otherwise, will be more complicated than for your predecessors. Therefore we have to hope that your commitment to the practice of veterinary medicine is very deep. Your willingness to confront this different future gives us reason to believe that you will participate with others in reshaping and redefining the delivery not only of veterinary health care, but through that, of human health care, in the coming decades.

In preparing to talk with you today I reviewed speeches and papers written 100 years ago, as your leaders were setting the agenda for the new century. I wanted to know what these leaders saw as the essential elements necessary for the continuing development of the field and how they would differ from the essential elements leaders might highlight today. Speakers were exhortatory in asking the graduating classes to do whatever was required to bring the university and the field up to its potential. Its potential included raising capital and investing it wisely, seeing to it that the field was independent, lengthening the courses in veterinary medicine, building the research and science enterprise, building their organizations, and advancing the status and conditions governing the profession. The future of veterinary education was believed to be tied to ensuring that veterinarians had a broad point of

view with regard to their domain in clinical work and science and that students had a right to expect the full measure of laboratory and clinical facilities in which to learn — no matter whose pockets the money came from to support these innovations. Only in this way could veterinary medicine achieve the high status which the public was ready to accord it. In his 1899 address to the American Veterinary Medical Association James Law remarked, "We stand at the parting of the ways and the future of veterinary education, and of the veterinary profession, depends on our ability to secure the means which will provide a modern scientific education."

These goals were met to a phenomenal degree during the 20th century and your School and its faculty were responsible for meeting and exceeding many of them. The leaders of 1899 seemed to be visionaries, however even they could not have envisioned the developments in this school alone which will shape your future and the future of the profession.

You will share in continuing to build and ensure the viability of your school and profession through some of the same avenues that the leaders talked about at the turn of the century: contributing to the capital enterprise, building the science, continuing to advance veterinary education in the clinical and biological spheres, and integrating research into your clinical practice. You will have several other goals to work on as well. One that was not discussed 100 years ago and which is necessary for all professions is seeking to further develop a peer review process for your practitioners which will include ethical considerations and clinical competence in practice. Another which you will have to wrestle with will be how you deal with the increasing domination of the for-profit corporate model in your work.

When you take a quick scan at what our veterinary school has offered you and the opportunities which they have created for you and other veterinarians in biological science, (and I know you shared my pride in the prominent mention of Dr. Karen Overall and the School in the recent *New Yorker Magazine*), in

animal-human interaction, in food safety, in animal rights, in aquatic science, in equine sports medicine, and I could go on — you can draw three messages at least: your education has been the richest in the field, your future is guaranteed to be as diverse and challenging as you want to make it, and your future is unbounded by today's achievements. These guarantees could not have been made to graduates 100 years ago.

There is another major difference between you and your predecessors. Speakers 100 years ago addressed their audience dramatically. They called on sons of Penn, Gentlemen, (stated repeatedly), men of singular aim, my brothers, men of the graduating classes — there were only he's, and him's in all the references and they certainly did not give me any doubt that there was not a professional woman in the room, or at least, if there was, they ignored them completely. Now, I don't want to offend those of you who are men but it is clear that veterinary medicine in the 21st century will be preponderantly a woman's profession.

That fact creates an imperative for both the men and women graduating today. While it is wonderful that women have options and opportunities today unknown to our predecessors, it is also true that the dominance of women in the field will require you to be active in fighting against the economic inequities which still burden us. I know very well some of the problems you will face. Men and women, have always chosen this profession more for the love of the work than for its monetary rewards. That is particularly wonderful in this day and age. However, you should pay careful attention to the inequities in income between fields dominated by women and those dominated by men, and those who choose fields based on their love for the work and those whose choice is initially made with money in mind.

Further, as corporations come to dominate the practice world, their offers will include a style of work that may be more attractive to women but also to men — it promises no necessary start-up loans, more controlled working hours, and a guaranteed salary, and benefits package

which brings more security to family life. However, be sure that corporate dominance will impact on the control of your practice and personal initiative. The corporations' connections to pharmaceutical and equipment companies will reduce your freedom to do comparative appraisals and judgments. It may be easi-

er, perhaps; but satisfying — questionable. There is such an enormous demand for veterinary services that there will be no compelling reason for you to accept restrictions on your freedom nor non-competitive incomes. This will require your own thoughts about strategies and actions and the advocacy of your associ-

ations so that they are proactive on your behalf.

As corporatization is likely to be in your future, I would like to share with you my views on the parallel trend in human health care. To put it simply, I believe that in human health care, the for-profit, market approach, is inappropriate, and immoral.

The sine qua non of market disciplines is that people can vote with their feet when they don't like the product. Alternative options are not available to most users of the health care system.

Markets are amoral in general; that is, sentimentally neutral, but in health care this general amorality has the potential to become immoral. The buyers, industry and government, want to reduce costs. The sellers, the managed care organizations, must reduce costs to remain competitive and provide profits to shareholders. Caregivers become implicit and explicit rationers of care who often benefit directly from rationing decisions, a factor that is unique in the American system, and exists nowhere else in the industrialized world.

More importantly, denying care to the sick diminishes us as human beings and as a society. Further, and perhaps most dangerous, a for-profit dominated system, grounded in price competition, forces the not-for-profits and the public sector to join in the same behaviors.

Universal health care must be on our policy agenda. Universal health care is inevitable. It is only a question of when. It will eventually succeed because the market approach is doomed to fail.

Let me highlight some signs of trouble that lead me to this conclusion.

1. The job market is changing rapidly and dramatically. In the next century we will find that employment and health benefits cannot be linked as they were in the past. We are seeing rising numbers of uninsured Americans, many working, who cannot afford the health insurance options offered by their employers.

2. Managed care, once seen as the solution to our escalating cost problems, is on a slippery slope and showing signs of deep strain and overreaching, particu-

*(continued on page 14)*

## **Claire M. Fagin, R.N., Ph.D., F.A.A.N.**

### **Leadership Professor Emeritus and Dean Emeritus of the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing**

*Claire M. Fagin, for over forty years you have been an internationally celebrated leader of the nursing profession and commanded immeasurable respect among your peers.*

*Your contributions to the field are notable, beginning with the baccalaureate nursing program that prepared nurses for primary care practice. You have been honored with myriad nursing awards, among them the Distinguished Scholar Award from the American Nurses Foundation and the Hildegard E. Peplau Award presented by the American Nurses Association. Your legacy includes a strong commitment to humanity. Your contributions were recognized by many, most notably by the Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences, as a Scholar-in-Residence, with the Philadelphia Women's Way "Women of Courage" Award, the University of Pennsylvania's Alumni Award of Merit, the Distinguished Daughter of Pennsylvania Award and, most recently, the New York University President's Medal.*

*As the first woman to serve as Chief Executive Officer of the University of Pennsylvania and the first woman to serve a term as Interim President of any Ivy League University, you brought honor and pride to the entire University and you provided pivotal support at a crucial time in the history of the School of Veterinary Medicine.*

*Your service to humanity continues through your incomparable leadership. Although retired as dean of the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing, you continue to teach and remain active with many professional and corporate organizations. Now returning to New York where you were born, raised and educated, we applaud your compassion and contributions to society through your forthright advocacy of universal health care and your involvement with New York City's West Side Urban Renewal Project.*

*The University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine has chosen the occasion of their 1999 Commencement to pay tribute to you and your scintillating accomplishments by awarding you the Bellwether Leadership Medal. We celebrate your rich achievements in education and the promotion of humankind by advancing the stature of women in all of the health professions.*



## Dr. Fagin's Commencement Address *(continued from page 13)*

larly in relation to Medicare and Medicaid. Companies have blamed their coverage of the medicare market for their huge losses last year and this year's second quarter profits are attributed to raising fees and getting out of medicare.

3. Labor Department economists noted that "Health insurance costs are picking up for the first time in three and a half years."<sup>1</sup> Out of pocket spending for premiums, coinsurance and copayments grew 5.3% to \$187.6 billion last year, the first time since the late 1980s that out-of-pocket growth outstripped costs for private health insurance.

Managed care or managed cost, has neither expanded the populations who receive care nor saved money for individuals and families. In fact, as I have stated, the market has shifted costs to these consumers through greater out of pocket costs, higher deductibles, higher copayments, and dehospitalization, leading often to great personal burdens and costs for families losing work days to care for their sick at home. If anyone has benefited by the market incursion into health care it would appear to be large corporate buyers, the pharmaceutical companies, some shareholders, and some hospitals.

Now what does all this mean to you? It's hard for me to believe that there are not direct parallels between what we see in for-profit human medicine and what you will experience in animal medicine. I have several reasons for saying this. First, many of your scientific and clinical innovations have a direct fit to human medicine and human health care. Second, you will have less opportunity to innovate when your practice is not under your own control. You have been very lucky in this respect. Yes, your incomes, in general, have not been on the same level as your colleagues in human medicine. You have not had the insurance advantages that they have had. But you have had a loving and respectful human and animal clientele who have not been separated from you by third party payers and now by the restrictive practices of companies, which are threatening all but the healthy, with sharp reduction in services. Third, and no less important, as respected clinicians and scientists, you

have a great influence on how all of us as citizens are affected by what goes on in the broad health field. Your voices count more than those of many of us who are directly involved in human health care. You are seen as the quintessential health care provider. The curer who is also the carer. The health carer who does not and can not separate the family priorities and concerns from the care and the treatment of the patient.



Your closeness to the patient and family is paramount. Keep it that way. If those of you in clinical practice move away from the caring role it will not only change your practice but it will change your image in our society. Think hard about developmental role changes that contradict what people value about you and remember always your historic mission. But also use your voices and your influence to bring your clinical and scientific knowledge into advocacy in the total health care scene today. Make your voices count for all of us.

In closing let me comment briefly about work. Until my experience at Penn which started in 1977, I had changed my career within nursing many times and, early on, so frequently that I thought I had a maximum two-year longevity per job. The job changes were always in nursing, a field which has given me the opportunity for learning, satisfaction, change, and commitment. I have loved my work.

Because work is so important, whatever you do, make sure that you don't let any of the negative parts of it dominate

your life. If they do make a change. Most of you will have to earn a living. Even those of you who don't, will find that work that you enjoy and that absorbs you carries you through all sorts of life crises that might be impossible to handle otherwise. I share the writer Jane Howard's view on work: That "work," [even] "with its inevitable drudgery and tension, is what allows most of us to transcend and redefine what... [We may have thought] were our limits. ...Work, for many of us, is the way we meet the people we most esteem and cherish. Work is what distracts us, at times for weeks on end, from life's incessant chaos and uncertainty. Even when it is menial, [and don't kid yourselves]... Everybody's often is, work confers some degree of pattern, purpose and continuity."

But what is most important is that you keep in sight your "vital powers" the Greeks spoke of, and challenge yourself on whether you are exercising them along lines of excellence. Penn has prepared you to do that and your wonderful school and its faculty will always be here to remind you of it.

In a great Victorian novel, *Middlemarch*, George Eliot described what she called "The other side of silence." She wrote, "If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heartbeat"... Because of the work you have chosen, you have the opportunity few in our society have to develop that keen vision and feeling for all ordinary life — because of this choice you have made you will reach the other side of silence, on occasion, and your whole being will be enriched in the process.

Congratulations to all of you. 