

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Below are the remarks from Dr. Danielle Laraque-Arena, upon her installation as the seventh president of SUNY Upstate Medical University, Syracuse, NY, on April 15, 2016.

As the only academic medical university in Central New York, SUNY Upstate is built around a mission of excellence in patient care, research, education and community service.

Good Afternoon. What a glorious day this is for me. I am deeply honored to be installed as the seventh President of the State University of New York, Upstate Medical University. I want to extend my heartfelt appreciation to The Onondaga Nation on whose traditional territory we gather today. I am joined on this special day by our distinguished guests: Chairman McCall, Chancellor Zimpher, members of the Board of Trustees, elected officials and community leaders. I want to welcome my family and thank them for the incredible support they have given me over the years, my husband Dr. Luigi Arena, my children Marc Anthony and Julia Marie, my brother and sister-in-law, Max and Elaine Laraque, my life-long friends, colleagues, my co-patriots from Haiti, and one special mentor and friend, Dr. Marie McCormick; so many more colleagues, family and friends from across the country and abroad who have come to celebrate with me, and to everyone at Upstate and in our communities who have made me feel so welcomed – thank you for celebrating with me as we continue to move forward to improve lives in Syracuse and Central New York – and to aspire to be a model for the nation and the world.

The theme of my address to you is **Local and Global Connectivity**. Please know that by virtue of your presence today, we are indeed connected, and I want to reflect on the purpose of our leadership and our commitment to the ideas and people we care for and about.

My role as President of Upstate Medical University encompasses overseeing our four colleges of Medicine, Graduate Studies, Nursing, and Health Professions as well as providing leadership for the Upstate University Hospital, composed of the Downtown Campus, Community Campus, the Golisano Children’s Hospital, the Upstate Cancer Center, the Joslin Diabetes Center and more than 80 specialty clinics. Our enterprise also includes our biomedical research, which includes investigations into the most pressing health conditions of our times and extends to the Center for Global Health and Translational Research, a dedicated Neuroscience Research Building, the Institute for Human Performance, the Biotech Accelerator and much more. We are fortunate to have the collective commitment and dedication of more than 9,000 employees supporting our mission — the largest workforce in the region — in pursuit of excellence and improvement of the lives and health of our communities.

The theme of CONNECTIVITY extends to connectivity in the sciences and in health, necessarily bound by what must connect us in the arts, our culture and the most difficult area, that of human relationships. In my brief comments to you today, I outline my beliefs of the imperatives for action.

We are surrounded by some bitter statistics on the status of our communities: a concentration of poverty; an epidemic of drug use; an epidemic of penetrating trauma where, each week, we witness the loss or destruction of life; lives lost to violence – homicide, suicide and caught in the crossfire. As part of our public health

mission we are committed to prevention and — through our science, care and education — to advancing effective solutions, also treating acute illness, mental illness and myriad chronic conditions.

In the past few months, since the announcement by the Board of Trustees of my appointment, the months of transition, and the past three months as President, I have had the opportunity to lead a process of strategic planning, faithful to our shared governance principles. Look now at some of the focused goals agreed upon by our participants. They include: elimination of health disparities; attracting, training and retaining the best talented clinicians, scientists and educators; increasing our responsiveness as a progressive health system; providing patient and family centered quality care; and enabling T1- to T4 research – to truly translate into practice our advances in scientific discovery in genomics, epigenetics, developmental biology and to fully utilize the explosion of basic science new knowledge and information technology.

Few could disagree with these goals. Other goals, however, may not be so obvious, such as support and commitment to a life-course approach in all interventions. I like to quote my dear colleague –former President of the American Academy of Pediatrics –Bob Block – when he says “all adults were once children, but not all children live to be adults.” This statement says to me that we must examine the antecedents of good health and that we must be equally focused in improving the life experience of each and every child and adult for the moment in which they live. As a pediatrician, this comment reminds me daily of our commitment to a life-course and preventive approach – a commitment to breakdown the silos that the profession of medicine has created in its quest for more detailed understanding of particular conditions – a commitment to the long view of being connected to each and every aspect of health. While the need to know through science, in depth, mechanisms such as the connections of the brain that lead to disorders such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder are critical to the understanding of possible strategies for prevention, treatment and eventual cure – it must not obscure our broader understanding and commitment to the social determinants of health. We must apply the knowledge we do have to solving the urgent problems of the day that affect health such as poverty, violence, and racism - locally and globally. These things are inextricably connected.

Another not so obvious goal is the commitment to develop purposeful leaders who are direct, respectful, kind and connected for action. Improved governance of health systems is required locally, nationally, and globally as we aim to achieve greater levels of health. Our interdependence as a global community demands this. I hope you witnessed the representation of the more than 20 flags belonging to our diverse, global student body. When I was appointed President of Upstate, my thoughts went back to a sabbatical in 2008 when I spoke with Dr. David Satcher, the 16th Surgeon General of the United States, and a former recipient of an honorary degree from Upstate. I remember my conversations with him on purposeful leadership – and his development of the Satcher Leadership Institute. When I spoke with David in February, we talked about leadership development in some distinct areas: Leadership and advocacy by parents — the collective, organized voices of parents has the potential to transform our response to many societal and health issues. Health professionals’ policy development can support the integration needed to complete the health care transformation that results in a just and equitable health system; and community leadership development can be applied to effectively harness the power of those who create policy and legislation, locally and globally.

The theme of purposeful leadership rings true for me today. One component of purpose is humility –not seeking to re-invent strategies but effectively connecting to others, including indigenous roots, where profound solutions to complex problems have been found. The Leadership Academy developed at Upstate has begun this journey by exposing a cross-section of our 9,000 employees to leadership training and to the numerous connections that must be made to function as ONE UNIVERSITY -to nurture our wellness – and to not exist as a collection of disconnected silos.

Now, let me take a brief moment to share with you just a sampling of the incredible science and education and care taking place here at Upstate. I want to highlight the work of a few individuals — but remind you that there are many more in our midst.

Scholarship and Knowledge

Dr. Stephen Faraone has been named one of the most influential minds in psychiatry and psychology today. He has been the principal investigator on several NIH-funded grants that address numerous conditions, including ADHD, bipolar disorder and substance use disorders in children. His studies on ADHD have brought greater understanding of the highly heritable nature of this condition and brought researchers closer to identifying specific genes that play a role in increasing susceptibility to ADHD. He and his group seek to discover new medicines for ADHD and autism, based on these genetic discoveries. What stands out about this scientist, however, beyond his genius, is his mentorship of others.

Collaboration and Research

Colleagues in the same department who also exemplify the collaborative spirit, are Drs. Wei-Dong Yao and Stephen Glatt who study synaptic function and molecular mechanisms, as well as population effects of psychiatric disorders. Their profound understanding of the need to change the conversation of scientists and the larger community, to share data and evolve ideas — ideas that are connected in fundamentally different ways — is what distinguishes them as scholars.

Compassionate Clinical Care and Leadership

Dr. Sharon Brangman is an incredible clinician who has dedicated her clinical, educational and research endeavors to the geriatric population - those 65 and older. As a result of improved public health, national policies such as social security and funding of universal health care for elders with Medicare, our population is living longer, healthier lives out of poverty. Nonetheless, this population is in need of specific, continuous and comprehensive services, in a family and community-centered approach. Dr. Brangman is doing just that. She also is the recent recipient of a \$2.3 million award to advance research and care for those suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

Outreach for Community Causes

Dr. Ann Botash is a pediatrician who has dedicated her life to the prevention, early identification and treatment of children affected by abuse and neglect. She is a consummate educator – understanding the key concepts of team-based, longitudinal care – absolutely essential in the evaluation and treatment of abused children and in support of their recovery. But what distinguishes her is her caring for people and the quality and compassion of her work. She is a true humanist – one who seamlessly combines the head and the heart.

Sharing with Others

I believe that our confidence and belief in ourselves and each other is central to our success. We must own these successes, spread them and share them unselfishly with others. While you celebrate me today – it is our shared purpose that is important. And, today, I am at the service of this University and our communities.

I am announcing today the launch of the **Presidential Symposium Series: Connected to the Future** that over the next 18-24 months will showcase how Upstate is forward thinking about the trends and needs of our 21st century University. These colloquia will bring together participants from a range of disciplines: the sciences; education; clinical practice; law; community; industry; and information systems to think *together* about our most pressing problems requiring novel and bold solutions. The focus will be on social, scientific and systems goals

that align our mission, vision and values in support of transformative health care delivery, transformative education and transformative research – actively engaging with the community and supporting the economic development of our region. A systems approach, embedded in our discussion, will plan to utilize our networking and partnerships to extend the education-care-research continuum in the Central New York areas to include not only its tertiary care center, but the networks of community-based organizations and secondary and primary health units. The upcoming interdisciplinary and inter-professional seminars will be action-oriented, designed to promote an exchange of ideas and to develop concrete steps to achieving results.

The six broad themes of the seminars:

- **Genes and Precision Medicine.** This area of study aligns the new sciences of genomics, epigenetics, receptor/cell/developmental biology and organ physiology with our previous understanding of the social determinants of health and socially and medically complex conditions. Building on our recent receipt of competitive funding for precision medicine, Upstate Medical University will host in October the noted geneticist and human rights activist Dr. Marie Claire King from the University of Washington School of Medicine, Professor of Genome Sciences and Medicine, and American Cancer Society Professor, to engage in active conversations of Upstate's necessary contribution to this field.
- **Society & Health.** The University will convene a group of experts to review population-based data and geo-mapping strategies to outline our strengths and challenges in crafting the university contribution to the discussion of the eradication of poverty and violence in our community. We have many partners throughout the community and in academia that can pool their talents to examine the policy and strategic levers to grapple with and solve these crushing economic, social and health problems.
- **Gender and Equity in Academic Medicine.** In January we engaged a consultant to examine the critical issue of gender equity. The role of a well-supported, diverse workforce within an equity framework is important to our progress. Diversity and inclusion must go beyond superficial approaches. The critical role diverse perspectives play in crafting solutions to health problems must be embedded into the fabric of our operations. A respect for culture is at the core of this approach.
- **Health Professionals for the 21st Century.** This seminar will bring together a group of stakeholders to spark the discussion and eventual planning to transform education to strengthen health systems, within a global perspective. Transformative education as described by Frenk, 2010, seeks to breakout of the inflexibility of curricula and professional silos, and to be responsive to local context –foundationally grounded on health needs and the concepts of social accountability.
- **Life-Course Approaches to the Health of Infants, Children, Adolescents, Young Adults, Adults and Elders.** This seminar will convene a broad group of professionals. Within this approach will be the theme of mental health — connecting our thinking of the evolution of mental illness and of the science of prevention. In addition, the link between our delivery of care via our Children's Hospital, our general medical and surgical specialties, our community-based linkages, and our deep investment in the lives of our oldest citizens will take a longitudinal perspective as to how our research, training and clinical care services can be aligned, integrated, and pose the right questions.
- Finally, in line with our focus on economic development, we will convene a group of experts to continue our work toward a **Sustainable Environment** — locally, regionally and with our global connections.

Underlying all these themes will be reliance on a robust big-data strategy, in support of a learning organization framework. To that end I have created a new position of Senior Vice President for Strategic Affairs to guide us toward measurable goals.

In integrating our history, culture and values, we are hopeful to continue to connect with all those on University Hill and beyond – including the Veterans Administration, other hospital systems, our SUNY partners, Syracuse University, the CenterState CEO corporation for economic development, the six nations, community-based organizations, especially in the public and human service sector, and of course our students, faculty and staff – as we march forward, building innovative solutions to complicated problems derived from open conversations.

This inaugural week has been remarkable with activities that included a student research day with presentation of a new President’s Award; activities with our community partners and neighbors; and events connected to wellbeing and volunteer service for our students, staff and faculty. I thank the inauguration organizing committee for carefully crafting our celebration today and this week, to reflect the theme of connectivity.

So in closing, I want to return to my final point of connectivity in human relationships. The most intractable problem we face is not the lack of knowledge but our inability to connect effectively to each other and to bring our actions in line with one purpose. I want to appeal to all of you connected today by this event to help me succeed in connecting us in a joint purpose of improving lives. Our region is small enough that anonymity is not a problem. We can know each other and learn to problem solve together –combining our specific talents to allow everyone to win. This graphic, by the artist Jason Anthony Lalor, is a depiction of optimism in our ability to be CONNECTED.

Thank you for being here today. I believe that what nurtures our hearts is our intellect, hard work, our families and the arts – so it is fitting now that we transition to this next part of our program that will revive our spirits and celebrate together what brings our humanity in unison. I dedicate this day to my parents Paul and Marcelle Laraque and my mother-in-law Santina Ciaramella Arena.

Thank you.