

Dr. John M. Thorp, Jr., McAllister Distinguished Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology, and founder and medical director of UNC Horizons, delivered these remarks at the Grand Opening of Shelton Station April 19, 2017

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No toastmaster or speechwriter would suggest I share my three fears on such an auspicious day; but, if I had followed the conventional paths, this program and building would not exist. So in honor of the hard work in entering much more profound fear and doubt our patients have done and will do, I will take a brief foray into my fears.

The first fear is that I will breakdown and weep as I see this distinguished crowd gathered in this beautiful space. Fortuitously, I have cried multiple times walking through these rooms as they were being built, and while not immune to the joy, think I can control my lacrimal ducts. Those humans who suffer with alcoholism and addiction, and their loved ones, know all too well that treatment often occurs at the margin. We are most familiar with church basements and double-wide trailers. Just like the UNC Health System's beautiful Cancer Hospital, this space will say to the women and children bravely embracing treatment, that they merit the healing grace of an aesthetically lovely location.

The children we care for will finally have the rooms and playground to match all the wonderful things we see happen in their lives. Learners from across campus will come here and realize this highly prevalent and lethal disease is equally worthy of their attention. The co-location of behavioral and physical health might even point to the state and nation, the key to reducing the cost of health care.

The second fear is what I will describe as 'academy award appreciation apprehension.' To accomplish something of this magnitude within the complexities of state government, University campus, academic health center, and town administration requires a plethora of patrons and favor. Relax, I will not list them all by name and rather express gratitude to each one on one:

I must say to the Senator, Governor, Chancellor, Dean, and my Chair what a privilege it is to work in a public university and health system that is 'operated by and for the people of North Carolina' where social entrepreneurs are giving a protected place to implant and develop. My career and this program are the fruits of that environment and investment. The Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at UNC leads the world in improving women and children's health and the latitude and support I enjoy are unprecedented.

The legacy of the University of North Carolina in gestating such enterprises is alive and well. Two entities though, require public recognition and are likely to be overlooked. First is our 80+ employees who day-in and day-out work the miracles we celebrate today. None does this to get materially enriched and each is a true hero. If we do not have great treatment that operates in the black, new buildings would be superfluous. Second are our clients, who do the real work of recovery. Their courage in taking steps to break the intergenerational cycle of depravation this disease produces is the true foundation of what we do. I would ask both staff and clients to stand and you join me in expressing gratitude.

The final fear is like a coach who beats Texas Southern by 39 points in the first round of the NCAA tournament. While we want everyone to celebrate today, please do not conclude that the work is done. Two or three North Carolinians will die from addiction or alcoholism in the next 24 hours, thirty children will go into foster care, most less than 6 years old, 10 women will enter incarceration with 8 of them having a substance use disorder, and trauma and violence too shameful to describe in public will be inflicted on those who are ill.

We know how to make a difference and every perinatal region in N.C. and Women's Prison needs a comprehensive gender-specific, trauma-informed treatment program like Horizons. Our vision is to replicate ourselves across the state, nation, and globe. We are fortunate to have our founding executive director Connie Renz consulting with the State along those lines and our current leader Hendree Jones doing such work around the world. To paraphrase my Dean, Dr. Roper, when you compare the cost of not doing so or doing in suboptimal fashion not designed for healing like a prison or child protective services, one quickly realizes that we cannot afford to waste the fiscal and human capital that recovery unlocks.

So dance with us today and even start a new tradition after big victories in Carrboro of rushing Greensboro Street and lighting bonfires to leap over, but don't lose sight that when our staff goes back to their desks and listens to the voicemail this afternoon there will be multiple calls from desperate women and children in need of help, that we will have to put on our over hundred member waiting list.

Don't forget we have scores of graduates every year who have put down roots in our community, obtained entry level jobs or entered school, and have children progressing their education, who can't afford to live here. Don't forget the large number of University students who leave home, test their genotypes with substances, and wake up or even die with this disease. Those victims lack effective treatment options, particularly the women who need a gender specific, trauma informed program.

Don't forget that this beautiful space is three quarters paid for, but we need to pay back the remaining million dollars to the University Real Estate Foundation that made such a bold bet on us. This is not a disease like cancer or preterm birth that needs the discovery of a miracle cure to see substantive gains occur, but progress is simply a matter of will and resolve.

Rejoice for today and then resolve to join us in this struggle.

We know the way and need your will.