

**Address by the Honourable Dr. Rishad Seecharan
Minister in the Ministry of Health
UWI Faculty of Medical Sciences, School of Dentistry
Oath Taking Ceremony
Amphitheatre D, Faculty of Medical Sciences, Mt Hope
Thursday 31st July, 2025 @ 3:00pm**

Good afternoon,

It is truly an honour to stand before you today, not only as the Minister in the Ministry of Health, but as a fellow dentist. This moment is more than a formality. For me, it feels like a homecoming. As I look around this room, I see future leaders, innovators and custodians of our nation's health and I also see reflections of myself, many years ago, filled with anticipation, hope and pride on the day I took my own professional oath.

Let me begin by extending my heartfelt congratulations to the Graduating Classes of 2024 and 2025. Today marks the culmination of years of rigorous study, perseverance and personal sacrifice. You've endured demanding exams, long hours, clinical challenges and countless sacrifices. Yet, here you are. You have risen to the occasion and today is your well-deserved reward. Take a moment to savour this achievement, you have earned it.

While this ceremony celebrates your academic success, it represents much more. Today is a rite of passage. You are not simply becoming licensed professionals; you are being entrusted with a sacred responsibility, to care for others, to act ethically and to practise with compassion and excellence.

Dentistry, at its heart, is where science meets humanity. You will restore smiles, yes, but you will also restore confidence. You'll help someone eat without pain, speak without fear and laugh without hesitation. You'll spot early signs of serious illness through routine exams. You will be the first line of defence for more than just oral health.

In our diverse society, patients will come to you from every walk of life; young and old, fearful and brave, rich and poor. Each of them will carry a story. Some will be in physical pain; others in emotional distress. Your job is not just to diagnose and treat, but to honour their stories, to offer them reassurance and to help them reclaim not just their health, but their confidence. This is the true calling of a healthcare professional and it demands not only skill, but also resilience.

There will be days when things don't go according to plan. There will be patients you cannot save, procedures that are more difficult than expected and moments of doubt. When those times

come and they will, remember this: you are capable. You are prepared. You belong in this profession. Ask for help when you need it and keep going. For the impact you make will far outweigh the setbacks you encounter.

I also encourage you to see yourselves as part of something greater than individual practice. You are now members of the broader healthcare community; an essential force in building a stronger, more equitable, and more resilient healthcare system here in Trinidad and Tobago.

As you prepare to take your professional oath, I want to offer you a quote from renowned American dentist Dr. Charles Mayo, co-founder of the Mayo Clinic:

“The aim of the dentist is not only to restore the mouth to health, but to restore the patient to wholeness.”

This, graduates, is the essence of what we do. Dentistry is not confined to the treatment of teeth, it is a vital part of total health and wellbeing. Oral health is health, and in your hands lies the power to help restore both.

Our country faces a host of complex public health challenges, including: a high burden of non-communicable diseases. The state of oral health in Trinidad and Tobago is a particular cause for concern. According to the World Health Organization’s Oral Health Country Profile (2022), the most

prevalent oral conditions in our population are untreated dental caries and periodontal disease. These issues are especially widespread among children and adults.

The contributing factors are well known: poor diets, particularly those high in sugar; tobacco use and inadequate oral hygiene. These are all modifiable risk factors, which means we have both an opportunity and an obligation to change this narrative.

It is important to recognise that poor oral hygiene and untreated oral diseases are not isolated concerns. They are closely linked to non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which are the leading cause of death and disability in Trinidad and Tobago. Conditions such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease are not only influenced by poor oral health but can also exacerbate it. For example, periodontitis has been shown to increase blood sugar levels, complicating diabetes management, while gum disease has been associated with worsening cardiovascular conditions like atherosclerosis and endocarditis.

In other words, oral health is an integral part of overall health and must be treated as such. The mouth, as we often say in medicine, is the gateway to the body. To care for the mouth is to protect the whole person.

As Minister in the Ministry of Health, I assure you of the Ministry's commitment to supporting your growth and ensuring the conditions that allow your talents to thrive. However more importantly, I challenge you to not just practise dentistry but to live it. Live its values. Let your work be guided by excellence, empathy and integrity.

Once again, congratulations to each of you. This is not just the end of your academic journey, it is the beginning of a life dedicated to care, compassion and purpose. We welcome you into the dental profession with pride and into the broader healthcare family with great hope.

Together, let us build a future where world-class, equitable and compassionate healthcare is not a privilege, but a standard for every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you—and may your journey in dentistry be fulfilling, impactful and deeply rewarding.