



Icahn
School of
Medicine at
Mount
Sinai

2021 WHITE COAT REMARKS DENNIS S. CHARNEY, MD

MOUNT SINAI: A PLACE WHERE HEROES TEACH, TREAT, DISCOVER

Members of the Boards of Trustees, Family, Friends, Faculty and Class of 2025, welcome to the White Coat Ceremony at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai.

Although we are still in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, I want to reassure you that we are 100% devoted to provide the best educational experience that is certain to train the next generation of outstanding physicians and scientists who will change the lives of patients locally and throughout the world. Indeed, I believe the stresses and demands of the pandemic will enhance your educational experience and, I predict, facilitate your growth as a person.

As you settle into your lives as Mount Sinai students I want to share with you that I know you are brilliant, I know you are hardworking, I know you are passionate, and I know you hunger for knowledge. I know you come from a diversity of backgrounds—culturally, ethnically and geographically to name a few—and such differences will enrich the experience of your entire class. Over the next four years, your immersion in our innovative curriculum, research and extracurricular activities will create bonds that will last a lifetime. Your time as medical students at Mount Sinai will shape you as a person, and as a physician and scientist.

Mount Sinai Heroes

Let me tell you a few things about the School you have chosen. Over the past 18 months, the response of the entire Mount Sinai community to the pandemic has been nothing short of incredible. When COVID-19 reached New York City, Mount Sinai physicians, nurses, trainees, and support teams – with little warning or time for preparation --demonstrated unbelievable expertise, courage, perseverance, and ingenuity. Applying every tool in their clinical armament, they cared for an endless stream of very sick patients, ignoring the risks to their own health in order to treat those in need. And while our clinicians battled COVID-19 on the front lines, at the very SAME TIME our

scientists tirelessly studied the virus, and worked closely with clinicians to find better ways of fighting this deadly virus. They made fundamental discoveries such as developing the world's best antibody assay, and identifying that anti-coagulation, monoclonal antibodies, and moderating the immune response can markedly improve outcomes. They saved lives.

We established a Chronic COVID Center of Excellence to characterize the long-term effects of COVID-19 on multiple organ systems. Our scientists developed a COVID-19 vaccine that is currently in clinical testing. And because our motto is that we take care of our own, early in the pandemic we established the nation's first Center for Stress, Resilience, and Personal Growth to provide emotional support for our frontline healthcare workers.

Our people work through their exhaustion, and they work through their fear. They do not stand down. In fact, for many this is a defining career and personal moment as they provide the best possible care for patients, while fighting the virus and develop new strategies for healing. They are heroes in every sense of the word.

This is your Mount Sinai.

These same amazing people will be your teachers, mentors and role models. You have joined a medical school in which rising to challenges is the norm, not the exception. Courage in the face of personal risk, character molded by adversity... each day at Mount Sinai is an opportunity to learn more about ourselves and each other, and to test our individual and collective limits and capabilities. And I know that this is why you joined us.

How do I know that?

I have read what drew you to study medicine! Here are some examples:

Students Say Why Medicine or Science

“My personal and academic experiences motivate me to help and heal others, and to do so by pushing innovation and science forward. I also want to work to expand healthcare knowledge and expertise to underserved communities worldwide.”

A physician has “the ability to explore the way social factors uniquely impact underrepresented populations’ health outcomes. Moreover, the study of medicine is great to me because it allows you to share many roles: a doctor, social worker, researcher, etc. There is also an overwhelming recognition that diversity in medicine is paramount to creating equity in healthcare for underserved populations. I am excited to learn amongst people who are committed to this ideal.”

“This interest became personal for me when my grandmother died prematurely of kidney disease. I was heartbroken over her death and frustrated at the inadequacy of current treatments. This solidified my motivation to do medical research with the goal of developing new therapies for incurable diseases.”

“I have many friends who have returned from war with severe physical and mental injury. Modern medicine’s successes and failures in their healing motivated me to not just talk about it, but also go after it and BE ABOUT IT.”

Finally,

“We all need a hand in becoming the best possible versions of ourselves and to fulfill our purposes or callings. Medicine is a place where some of our greatest vulnerabilities occur and our human brokenness is visibly exposed. Yet, medicine is also where the greatest possibilities of hope and healing can occur. I am attracted to the mission of being a hand for patients who are healing and patients who are dying, that in whatever circumstance, they may still experience the best versions of themselves possible.”

Life as a Physician or Scientist

Class of 2025, what will your life as a physician and scientist be like? As the experience of the pandemic has revealed, being a physician and scientist is stressful.

As a physician, people come to you in the crisis of their lives, asking you for answers.

Being a doctor means living up to immense expectations of society.

At any hour, in any place, it is assumed if tragedy strikes there will be a doctor on hand to handle the case with grace and confidence.

Both physically and mentally, doctors are expected to stitch up the victims of adversity.

When epidemics emerge, when the unspeakable occurs, it often falls upon physicians to be first responders, to explain how, and why, even when it may be inexplicable.

And as scientists, will you have the creativity to come up with ideas that no one else has thought of? And when your ideas are ridiculed, even violently opposed, will you never give up to make the discovery that could help millions of patients?

Yes, being a doctor and scientist is tough. The challenges are daunting.

Yet, let me also be among the first to tell you it can be incredibly rewarding.

In fact, the very same elements that make it difficult are often what make it worthwhile.

Yes, today too few patients will be cured. Sometimes, though, you will save a person’s life. And some of you will make a discovery that will help many, if not millions of people. Granted, we all come into medicine expecting such moments to be more frequent than they are, but these moments exist. **They are not a myth.**

Yes, we are often called upon to show strength during professional and personal tragedy. **To show strength, to show courage,** to inspire those around us by demonstrating **RESILIENCE** under **DURESS** – this is a **PRIVILEGE**.

Today, we all face the challenges of the pandemic, the lack of equity in health care and social justice, and the existence of structural racism in medicine. It is during these times that leadership can make all the difference.

Class of 2025, what will it take for you to become leaders of the next generation of physicians and scientists? Will the times make you a leader? Or will you, as leader, shape the times?

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Martin Luther King said,
“Only in darkness can you see the stars.”
And “of all forms of inequity, injustice in healthcare
is the most shocking and inhumane.”

In, *On the Pulse of the Morning*, Maya Angelou wrote
Lift up your faces, you have a piercing need
For this bright morning dawning for you.
History, despite its wrenching pain
Cannot be unlived, and if faced
With courage, need not be lived again.
Lift up your eyes upon
This day breaking for you.
Give birth again
To the dream.

Finally, Amanda Gorman, in *The Hill We Climb*, wrote

When day comes we step out of the shade,
afame and unafraid,
the new dawn blooms as we free it.
For there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it.
If only we're brave enough to be it.

Class of 2025, you have the ability to achieve greatness and ease the suffering of our patients, our communities, and even our nation. The stakes are as high as ever. What we need is a group of dreamers to rise against the tide of history and believe it is possible to succeed where generations past have fallen short. You will have many medical facts to memorize and learn, but do not forget to let your imagination run wild, to lead, and to seek solutions to the most difficult problems we face as people.

THANK YOU!