



Icahn
School of
Medicine at
Mount
Sinai

COMMENCEMENT 2016

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AGAINST ALL ODDS

The Graduates of the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai have the resilience, intelligence, passion, and commitment to overcome life's challenges, to be the nation's next generation of great scientists and physicians, who discover cures for the most serious diseases and develop and participate in new models of healthcare designed to reduce inequities in healthcare for those who need it most.

Welcome to the 47th Commencement of the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai.

Family Members, Trustees, Faculty, Alumni, and Honored Guests; Today we celebrate the Class of 2016 who, I know have the Resilience, Courage, and Determination to overcome Life's Greatest Challenges.

I also know that they have the creativity and intelligence to DISCOVER CURES for the most serious diseases.

And I am SURE they have the motivation to develop and participate in new models of healthcare, designed to reduce inequities of the underserved.

The Class of 2016 consists of some of the Best and Brightest graduating medical students and scientists in the United States.

The Best? How can I make this assertion with confidence?

Permit me to give some examples.

- The parents and grandparents of many of our graduates emigrated from countries around the world.... often with little resources, working multiple jobs, giving their sons and daughters the resilience to achieve the American Dream.
- The family of one of our graduates all became citizens on the same day.... a day they will never forget.
- Some have risen from the scourge of poverty and inner city violence.
- Others have overcome family discord, even abuse, and the challenges of a single parent home.
- There are graduates in this room who experienced trauma and the stress of serious illness and death of parents, close family members and friends.

How did they get to this day of achievement and overcome all odds?

- They Never Gave Up!
- The words of Maya Angelou ring TRUE.... "You may encounter many defeats but you must not be defeated. In fact it may be necessary to encounter defeats, so you can know who you are and know what you can rise from."

The Class of 2016, the Brightest!

That's easy

How about the Awards they have received:

- The American Medicine Association Foundation Excellence in Leadership Award
- The prestigious AAMC Herbert W Nickens Award

- The Center for Disease Control – Hubert Global Health Fellowship

- A National Institute of Health – Medical Research Scholarship

Commitment to the Local and Global Community? Unrivaled!

- Founded Medical Students for Haiti

- Established the East Harlem Health Outreach Partnership National Consulting Service to assist medical students throughout the country to start their own student-run free clinic for the poor.

Entrepreneurs? YES!

- Founded multiple biomedical startup companies

- The Comic Clinic – a group aimed at promoting both medical student and patient wellness through a shared love of art and story telling

- East Harlem Software Company – which has developed web-based apps for clinicians to track important clinical information and practice guidelines.

Conducted great Science that has the potential to change the lives of millions of patients.

- Over 34 graduating medical students have a first author publication, as do literally all of the graduating PhD students.

- Research Findings include

- New therapeutic approaches to the most serious viral illnesses – possibly leading to vaccines and anti-viral drugs

- Novel treatment approaches for cancers that metastasize throughout the body

- Identified disease pathways and therapeutic targets for Multiple Sclerosis

- Developed methods to screen and predict breast cancer risk in new mothers

- Characterized the impact of adolescent use of marijuana on brain development – and the risk of developing psychiatric disorders

Class of 2016, your accomplishments are impressive, and your future is bright. But with these, my parting words to you, I wish to speak of important work that remains to be done.

I ask you to join your alma mater in making a commitment to embrace diversity – 360° – as it relates to medical education, scientific research, and providing high quality clinical care for all.

Racism in medicine still exists, but is often only talked about at a superficial level. Mount Sinai intends to LEAD the Nation by providing a comprehensive education for our students, residents,

and faculty on unconscious bias, social determinants of disease, and disparities in healthcare.

A core value of our medical school from the day it was established is an unequivocal commitment to social justice and humanism in medicine.

Similarly, Mount Sinai Hospital was founded in 1852 on the principle of equal access to high quality healthcare for everyone.

And, currently, the Mount Sinai Health System has the responsibility and the privilege for providing healthcare to, perhaps, the most diverse population in the nation.

Why is this so important?

We know that on virtually every measure of health, racial and ethnic minorities fare far worse than their white counterparts – from diabetes, heart disease, asthma, cancer, to infant mortality. These disparities can be explained by many factors including lack of access to affordable healthcare, poor nutrition, and lack of exercise. But other factors are at work.

Studies indicate that relationships between patients and physicians of the same race or ethnic background are characterized by higher levels of trust, respect and patient satisfaction. This is not to say that physicians must be of the same race as their patients. But it does highlight the need to have a greater understanding of cultural diversity.

Less well known is the fact that many drugs have varying efficacy in groups with different ethnic and ancestral backgrounds. For example, some asthma medications are less effective in people who self-identify as African Americans and Hispanic. People who self-identify as Asian have a higher incidence of adverse drug reactions from cancer chemotherapy.

The problem is confounded by the fact that a focus on diversity in clinical research is still the exception, not the rule. Although ethnic minorities in the United States have greater rates of and mortality from serious disease, they are generally less likely to be enrolled in clinical trials. Of the over 10,000 clinical trials funded by the National Cancer Institute since 1993, only around 150 studies focused on racial or ethnic minorities!

Mount Sinai intends to be part of the SOLUTION. Our investigators will form partnerships with physicians and residents in under-represented communities – we will emphasize increased recruitment of minority physicians and scientists.

Remarkably, there is growing evidence that embracing diversity – in all aspects – is key to breakthrough science. Diversity, in this context, means an inclusive approach, both to the science, itself, and the make-up of Research Teams.

Decades of research indicate that socially diverse groups (that is, those with a diversity of race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation) are more creative and innovative than homogeneous groups.

- Diversity in science brings together investigators who approach problems from different angles, contributing to a more complete understanding.
- Diversity balances biases that may inhibit scientific progress. It contributes to the Collective Intelligence of the research group.
- Most Importantly, when individuals from under-represented groups become scientists – they often choose scientific areas that will impact people they care most about.
- When science is inclusive, everyone wins.

- Long underserved communities are finally heard and helped!

Class of 2016, Today, I speak of Diversity because I need your commitment

Graduating Physicians:

- Will you embrace the diversity of your patients?
- And understand that with Diversity there is Beauty and there is Strength.
- And lead the charge as advocates and activists to eliminate Bias and Health Inequities in your local communities and around the world.

Graduating Scientists

- Will you embrace diversity in Thought and in Action?
- Will you encourage new ideas from all aspects of science?
- And strive to make research discoveries that will help underserved, diverse populations?

Class of 2016

I leave you with the advice of Harriet Tubman the American Abolitionist and Humanitarian,

“Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember you have the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.”

May your dreams come true and so may those of the patients we serve.

THANK YOU!