



WHITE COAT ADDRESS, 2014
DEAN DENNIS S. CHARNEY, MD

Mount Sinai Converts Idealism into Action for the Betterment of Patients Everywhere

Dennis S. Charney, MD, Anne and Joel Ehrenkranz Dean of the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai and President for Academic Affairs of the Mount Sinai Health System, delivered the following remarks at the 17th Annual White Coat Ceremony on September 8, 2014, in Stern Auditorium.

The White Coat Ceremony marks the beginning of the academic year and welcomes first-year students into the medical profession. As students are helped into their white coats by faculty, they are reminded of the significance of their profession and their responsibility to balance scientific knowledge with compassion.

Class of 2018, Family and Friends, Faculty, and members of the Mount Sinai Boards of Trustees,

Welcome to our annual White Coat Ceremony!

The presentation of the White Coat to our Medical Students at the onset of their training is symbolic of starting the journey from medical student to physician.

The men and women of the Class of 2018 are destined to be the next generation of leaders of our profession. To be sure, they come to Mount Sinai from top undergraduate colleges and universities and have mean GPAs and MCAT scores as high as any other students in the nation.

But they are much more than that – We, their teachers, marvel at their accomplishments as athletes, musicians, writers, researchers, as well as advocates and activists for their local and global communities. Indeed, some of the members of the Class of 2018 have inspiring personal stories of overcoming challenging obstacles, and they will serve as role models for many others.

What are our expectations of their future accomplishments?

We are fond of saying, Mount Sinai graduates don't just read medical textbooks, they write them.

I guarantee you that some members of the Class of 2018, sitting before us, will make scientific discoveries that will improve our ability to prevent, diagnose, and treat patients with the most serious medical diseases.

Others will become master clinicians and educators.

And still, others will focus on improving public health for underserved communities throughout the world.

Class of 2018, whichever medical path you choose, your work here will change lives and save lives.

The Talmud – the rabbinical commentary on the Bible – states,

“Whoever saves a single life, it is as if he saved an entire world.”

With that perspective, what greater calling can we have than medicine? So there is reason for us all to be inspired, and for you to pursue a career in medicine powered by Idealism.

Idealism has been defined as *“The cherishing or pursuit of high or noble principles, purposes, or goals”*.

Unfortunately, recent academic studies of medical students reveal a decline in Idealism as their training proceeds. This occurs as students are burdened by mounting debt, the lack of role models, and difficult clinical experiences.

Idealism is replaced by cynicism and skepticism.

However, I assure you, this does not occur at Mount Sinai, NOT at the Icahn School of Medicine!

Indeed, the Mount Sinai Medical Student is characterized by an Idealism that grows from year to year.

This is because of our unequivocal commitment to mentorship through exposure to great scientists, and outstanding clinicians, who serve as role models that enlighten the path forward. And by providing a learning experience from patients of every walk of life – from New York City to over 35 countries around the globe.

Class of 2018, we will nurture your Idealism by enriching your personal and professional life.

At Mount Sinai we translate Idealism into Action for the Betterment of Patients Everywhere.

We share the sentiments of Paul Farmer, Founder of Partners in Health

“For me (and Mount Sinai – I might add), an area of moral clarity is: you're in front of someone who is suffering and you have the tools at your disposal to alleviate that suffering or even eradicate it, and you act!”

- Class of 2018, you will be embedded in a Mount Sinai culture that embraces innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship.
- And where altruistic and empathic behavior is highly valued.

We believe in the assertion of the Dalai Lama that compassion can be good medicine

A mind committed to compassion is like an overflowing reservoir – a constant source of energy, determination and kindness. This is like a seed; when cultivated, gives rise to many other good qualities, such as forgiveness, tolerance, inner strength and the confidence to overcome fear and insecurity. The compassionate mind is like an elixir; it is capable of transforming bad situation into beneficial ones.”

Class of 2018, we will train you to lead and thrive in an environment that can be stressful; despite hardship and obstacles that you may face and, more importantly, that your patients will face while they look to you for solace and comfort. We will help you be at your best and provide HOPE even in life's darkest moments.

At Mount Sinai Hospital, we recently admitted a patient with a possible Ebola Virus infection. I asked one of our interns if he was afraid. His response *“No. This is what Mount Sinai is all about. We provide the best care to those who need it most”*.

I leave you with a final thought on the impact you can have on the World –

Imagine as physicians you save the lives of just 100 people and each one of those folks changed the lives of 100 people, then in 3 generations or 75 years, 140 million people will have had their lives changed for the better!

So sitting here, filled with your Idealism, I say to each and every one of you, let's grow our Idealism together! Let's channel it to do good works, in the research laboratory, in the clinic, and in the community! As our faculty teaches and motivates you, I expect you to inspire us to accomplish what we all thought was impossible.

Thank you!