



WHITE COAT ADDRESS, 2011
DEAN DENNIS S. CHARNEY, MD

MOUNT SINAI
SCHOOL OF
MEDICINE

CHALLENGING THE FRONTIERS OF MEDICINE - 360°

Dennis S. Charney, MD, The Anne and Joel Ehrenkranz Dean of Mount Sinai School of Medicine and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs of The Mount Sinai Medical Center, delivered the following remarks at the 14th Annual White Coat Ceremony on September 12, 2011, 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.

The White Coat Ceremony celebrates past accomplishment and the commencement of a journey of discovery.

Class of 2015, you have the potential (and I highlight **potential**) to be the best class in the history of the Mount Sinai School of Medicine. You were educated at outstanding undergraduate colleges and universities, and you have the highest grade point average and MCAT scores in Mount Sinai's history.

This places you among the very top first-year classes admitted to medical schools in the United States this year.

You, the class of 2015, have told me that you want to contribute to improving the health of the world's citizens, reducing disparities in health care between rich and poor, and discovering cures for the most serious diseases.

In other words, you want to do it all! You are ready to challenge the Frontiers of Medicine – 360°!

Class of 2015, before you take on the challenges that lie ahead, stop and recognize that you did not get to this time and this place by yourself. So, stand up, and acknowledge your family and friends, for their love and their guidance.

Class of 2015, also stop and know this – you will not be able to achieve your dreams without superb teachers and inspiring role models. I make you this pledge – your new Mount Sinai family, our faculty, will provide you with the knowledge and mentorship you will need to succeed.

However, over the next 4 years, you will bear much responsibility. "To whom much is given, much is expected" (*Luke 12:48*).

To help you meet – and exceed those expectations, I want you to consider the following roadmap:

1. **Maintain your support system.** The family and friends who helped you get here. They will stand by you during tough times.
2. **Be prepared to fail and learn from the experience.** In fact, if you don't fail at something important while you are at Mount Sinai, you are not pushing yourself hard enough! It will take some courage. As Winston Churchill said "Courage is going from failure to failure without losing enthusiasm."
3. **Embrace the unknown and dare to be innovative.** We are at a watershed moment in science and medicine – there is so much to be discovered. We, your teachers, want you to stand on our shoulders – so your vision can change the future of medicine for the better. Think out of the box. Innovators have the ability

to connect seemingly unrelated questions, problems, or ideas from different fields.

4. **Be altruistic and be guided by your conscience.** If you see an injustice, don't be passive...Act! Listen to Paul Farmer, one of the founders of Partners in Health who said, "I would argue that social justice should be central to medicine and utilized to be central to public health. This should be very simple! The well should take care of the sick." Check out the book by Tracy Kidder, *Mountains Beyond Mountains; The Quest of Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World*.
5. **Never give up.** Whether the challenges are personal or professional, take inspiration from individuals such as Stephen Hawking, perhaps the most famous scientist since Einstein, who has lived with ALS since his early 20s. He is now 69. Or from Barry Marshall, 2005 Nobel Prize in Medicine in 2005 for the discovery that *Helicobacter pylori* caused peptic ulcer disease. This discovery was not accepted without a fight. Most experts believed *Helicobacter* was harmless.

Marshall felt an urgency to convince the skeptics, given that peptic and gastric ulcer disease was a common and serious condition affecting 1 in 10 Americans (CDC, 1993). In the face of so much skepticism, what did Marshall do? He ingested a culture of *Helicobacter* himself, to prove that the bacteria could infect a healthy person and cause gastritis. Now, these diseases are easily diagnosed and treated.

Let me clarify: such drastic measures will not be required to succeed at Mount Sinai – but this is the passion we are looking for.

Finally – and this is the important part:

Class of 2015, I do not want you to act as 140 individuals, competing with each other. I want you to function as a team of 140 – as an intelligent, idealistic, motivated, great group! Help each other. Support each other. No one of you is as smart as all of you.

Take it from Steve Jobs, Apple founder and former CEO, "Discovery and innovation come from people meeting in the hallways or calling each other at 10:30 at night with a new idea, or because they realized something that shoots holes in how we have been thinking about a problem. Its ad hoc meetings of six people called by someone who he thinks he has figured out the coolest thing ever and who wants to know what other people think of his ideas...Great groups make a dent in the universe."

Let your journey begin!