

THE SHAPE OF GREATNESS

Welcome to the 50th Commencement of the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai.

Family members, Trustees, Faculty, Alumni and Honored Guests, sitting before you are the Class of 2019 graduates of the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, who are among the most distinguished graduates of any medical and graduate school in the world.

As we all know, our graduates did not get to this place of high achievement by themselves.

Let us have a moment of silence to think about the loved ones who supported them during the long journey to this day, and who could not be with us today.

Class of 2019 - Please stand, and with appreciative applause, thank those friends and family who are here with you today.

The Class of 2019 is characterized by remarkable achievements in scholarship, scientific discovery, and service to our local community and the nation!

They have been awesome advocates on many topics, including HIV/AIDS, global health, racism and bias, and incarcerated populations.

They have conducted exceptional science that has the potential to change the lives of millions of patients.

- 38 of our MD graduates took an extra Scholarly Year to enhance themselves as physician scholars.
- Together, our MD and PhD graduates have published hundreds of Peer Reviewed Publications in areas related to cancer, heart disease, neurological and psychiatric disease and many other disorders.
- Our graduates have made over 100 research presentations at conferences throughout the nation.
- Their scientific accomplishments, to name a few, include progress toward a universal influenza vaccine, a greater understanding of the genetic and molecular pathogenesis of immune deficiency, development of predictive analytics for infectious disease, and uncovering the mechanisms related to Alzheimer's disease.
- Some have become remarkable entrepreneurs, raising millions of dollars in one case, to form several companies utilizing novel software to improve the delivery of healthcare, develop new tools for genome sequencing to aid in patient diagnosis and treatment, and create new surgical devices.
- They have been brilliant scientific advocates, winning the 2019 Advancement for Women in Science Award, the 2019 Award for Science Advocacy, and developed scientific curriculum to inspire students in local East Harlem schools.

Graduates, you are obviously very talented, and extremely well trained. With that comes –

- High Expectations and Great Responsibilities

- There is so much left to solve in medicine. You have studied all the diseases, memorized all the drugs – ask yourself, how many of our treatments are truly curative? Very few.
- We need you to make transformative contributions toward a better understanding of cancer, heart diseases, brain diseases, and many other medical conditions, for which treatments are inadequate and certainly not curative. You need to make these **DISCOVERIES!**

A Digital Revolution in healthcare has started. But it still needs to find its way to help prevent, monitor, and treat human diseases. Help the Digital Revolution find its **WAY!**

Social injustice and equal care for all – Still not solved! Class of 2019, you are among the most progressive classes in the nation. You need to continue to be at the Forefront of the Movement.

What will it take for you, the Class of 2019, to accomplish these Goals?

- We need you to be Heroes.
- We need you to be, not merely good, but Great.
- We need you to Change the World.

As Joseph Campbell said –

“A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself.”

What is the shape of greatness?

Greatness comes from the desire to do extraordinary things – to see beyond the horizon and push beyond the envelope. It means aiming higher than where you set your mark, forcing yourself to get better, one victory at a time.

Wilma Rudolph – who fought and recovered from polio to become the fastest woman in the world – has inspired us to “Never underestimate the power of dreams and the influence of the human spirit. We are all the same in this notion: The potential for greatness lives within each of us.”

William Shakespeare agreed and encouraged us to “Be not afraid of greatness; some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon them.”

You can be a hero and you can become great. But if you want to change the world. You need to –

- Dare Greatly:
 - Without pushing your limits, without daring greatly, you will never know what is truly possible in life.
- Give your patients HOPE:
 - Hope is the most powerful force in the universe – it can ease the pain of unbearable loss.
- Use Failure to make you stronger!

- If you persevere, if you let failure teach you, and strengthen you, then you will be prepared to handle life's toughest moments.
- Be your very best in your darkest moments:
 - At some point you will have to confront the darkness – a crushing of your spirit and leaving you wondering will you ever see the light again. At that dark moment – thinking “Hello Sunshine won't you stay” – reach deep inside you and be your very best.

If you do all this, you can change the World!

THE POWER OF MEANING

It is not easy to be a physician and scientist.

It is stressful. We know depression and burn out are too high among our peers.

As a physician, there will be times, for patients and families that you have become close to, or even love, when all treatments will have failed and the disease cannot be conquered. They will look to you for answers in the waning hours of life when no answers exist.

As a scientist, there will be doubt, whether you have the creativity to come up with ideas that no one else has thought of.

And, there will even be times when your greatest ideas will be ridiculed and opposed. You will need to have the will and confidence to stay the course – the way some of the greatest scientists in history have.

It is during these times, especially, that you must find meaning in your work and your life.

To have a great purpose to work for, a purpose larger than oneself, is one of the secrets of making life significant for yourself and so many others.

Gandhi said, “My consolation and my happiness are to be found in service of all that lives....”

DOING THE IMPOSSIBLE

So, in the end, we, your mentors, are asking you to imagine that you can achieve tomorrow, what today is thought to be Impossible.

Remember the words of Albert Einstein, “Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand.”

CONGRATULATIONS!

THANK YOU!