



WHITE COAT ADDRESS, 2012
DEAN DENNIS S. CHARNEY, MD

MOUNT SINAI
SCHOOL OF
MEDICINE

MOUNT SINAI MENTORS TAKE CARE OF THEIR OWN

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 15th Annual White Coat Ceremony on September 14, 2012, 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 2016, Family and Friends, Faculty, and members of the Mount Sinai Boards of Trustees,

Welcome to our annual White Coat Ceremony.

The donning of the universally recognized—and globally respected—white coat has been an important symbol of the medical profession for over 100 years. At this institution, it represents the beginning of a bonding process, a mentorship experience, with the Mount Sinai Family... a relationship that will last not just the 4 years of medical school, but a lifetime.

As ever, I think Bruce Springsteen says it best when he says, “*We take care of our own.*” In the case of the Boss, he was speaking ironically; he speaks about disenfranchised Americans and our soldiers who should be, but often are not, properly cared for.

But I invoke this idea of caring for our own not as irony, but sincerity. How, at Mount Sinai, do we take care of our own? We do so through our unwavering commitment to train the Best and the Brightest students to become outstanding scientists and physicians.

- To innovate; to push the envelope; to not be bound by tradition, when tradition is an obstacle; to make discoveries, once thought impossible, that will change the face of medicine.
- To learn the art and science of becoming a truly great physician; to make the patient the center of what you do; to support and empathize with your patient; to commit to treating those who most need our care in our local community and around the world.

To achieve all this is truly a daunting task – I am sure it sounds and feels impossible!

Class of 2016, we are going to provide you the Roadmap. We are going to be your Mentors.

In Homer’s, *The Odyssey*, Mentor, who was a wise and faithful friend of Odysseus, was entrusted by Odysseus, when he went to fight in the Trojan War, to care for and teach his son Telemachus. After his father had been abroad for 20 years, and his home was being pillaged, and his mother, Penelope, was being besieged by suitors, the goddess of wisdom, Athena, disguised herself as Mentor, encouraged Telemachus to stand up to the suitors and leave to find out what happened to his father. Through the guidance of Mentor and Athena, Telemachus matured into a man of character, wisdom and independent spirit.

So, in time, the word Mentor became synonymous with a wise, trusted advisor engaged in nurturing, guiding and protecting another person.

Bill Russell, the great Celtics basketball player, whom *Sports Illustrated* named the 20th Century’s Greatest Team Player, provided this answer to the question -- Who mentored you?

“In my home, my parents were the rulers, no doubt about it. I did what they wanted me to do. They led, I followed. My mother protected me in this life. She was my shield and my guardian, she made the dangerous world I grew up in appear to be safe. My mother taught me to stand up for myself, to use my brainpower on my behalf.”

One day, when I was 12, she became ill and died, a complete and overwhelming shock. But even then, more strongly than ever, she stayed with me--in my thoughts, my goals, my aspirations. She appeared to me in dreams. Her teachings, remained with me when she was not around. She had the power to make herself invisible so that I might all the while focus on my own life, on what I had to do to become responsible for my success.

I have often wondered what it was that gave her the power of invisibility, and the only meaningful conclusion I have come to is that it was love. The power of her love for me was that strong. And in some way, it was not exceptional in that devoted parents always seem to have this invisible power that follows after their children, helping them do for themselves what they most need to do to be happy and successful.”

Class of 2016, please stand up, turn around, and acknowledge with grateful applause, your mentors in this room whose love and guiding light will stay with you, always.

Class of 2016, the road to becoming a physician travels through valleys and over mountains. This path is not easy. There will be challenges that may seem at times overwhelming. Be resilient and I pledge this to you – the faculty of Mount Sinai School of Medicine will guide you, inspire you, and stimulate you to a self-realization that will enable you to be the best you can be. They will take care of you.

Maya Angelou, the American Literary and civil rights icon, said in order to be an effective mentor, “*one must care, one must be a Rainbow in the Clouds.*” What a great phrase to describe a mentor – a Rainbow in the Clouds!

You will always have our help – when your sun is not shining – we will be your rainbows in the clouds.

Class of 2016, in return, I want you to make us better teachers. I want you to demand that we provide you a medical education that is second to none!

My goal for Mount Sinai School of Medicine is to be a transformative force for change in medicine – to be the leading medical school in the nation in fostering innovation in education, research, and clinical care.

Together, we can accomplish this goal.

Harriet Tubman, the legendary humanitarian and abolitionist, who rescued hundreds of slaves at great personal danger, left us with an inspiring message –

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

Indeed, your mentors at Mount Sinai will enlarge your dreams and nurture your passions ... so you can take care of the world.

Thank you!