



Icahn
School of
Medicine at
Mount
Sinai

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS 2025

ERIC J. NESTLER, MD, PHD

ICAHN SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AT MOUNT SINAI

Thank you, Dean Charney. Class of 2025, family members, faculty, and Trustees, it is with a deep sense of honor, gratitude, and commitment that I address you today.

Parents and grandparents, I speak for our entire faculty when I say that we share in your pride and joy. We fully appreciate the years of nurturing, the long labor of love, that was required to bring your children to this great day. Thank you. [Class, please show your appreciation.] (applause).

Graduates and fellow faculty members, we have been privileged to have had Dennis Charney as our Dean for close to 20 years. I know you have taken inspiration from his leadership, as I have. It is the privilege of a lifetime for me to succeed Dr. Charney as Interim Dean.

Dr. Charney has been a close professional colleague and dear friend for more than 40 years. He is one of the greatest transformational leaders in the history of biomedicine. His explicit goal when he took the reins was to elevate Mount Sinai from good to great and that's exactly what he achieved. Today, the Icahn School of Medicine is one of the nation's elite biomedical institutions.

In part, this has been the result of Dennis's ability to motivate everyone, myself included, to give their very best—to aim high, be bold, take chances, and build innovative world-changing programs. Dennis, thank you. (applause).

Science has always been at the core of our transformative strategy. We have recruited brilliant scientists and physicians from around the world who engage in groundbreaking research and clinical care, and teach and mentor our medical and graduate students.

Today's graduating students have advanced our understanding of complex brain disorders; identified causes

and treatments for cancer, diabetes, and inflammatory diseases; and solved the pathogenesis of infectious agents. Our graduate and medical students have published in the world's most influential scientific journals. We are so very proud of all of you!

I am especially pleased with your achievements and acquired knowledge because you are entering a world of tremendous challenges, both to the practice of medicine and to the future of science itself. The National Institutes of Health, by far the world's most important sponsor of biomedicine, has announced cutbacks in its research funding. This is a threat not only to scientific progress, but also to the future of health care and a vibrant economy.

Science, after all, is the very foundation of medicine. It is thanks to science that we are all able to safely gather here, because science—much of it done at our School—stopped the COVID-19 pandemic in its tracks. Science is the reason that many of you are blessed to have your grandparents sharing in your joy today. In my parents' day, it was all too common for men in their 40s or 50s to die of heart attacks. Thanks to the work of geneticists and bio-chemists, cholesterol-lowering statins and blood pressure medications enable tens of millions of Americans to reach old age.

Disease knows no political party—it can strike anyone. As physicians and scientists, our allegiance is to humanity—to apply biomedical research to better understand disease so that we can end suffering, heal patients, and save lives. Science should not be politicized—not by the left, or by the right. Ever.

Science must move forward. Especially now, when powerful new research technologies are driving an unprecedented understanding of the causes and mechanisms of human disease, and beginning to advance fundamentally new therapeutics for the diseases that define our time—

Alzheimer's disease, cancer, cardiovascular disease, depression, diabetes, and obesity, to name just a few. These advances mean that your clinical practice a decade from now will be unrecognizable by today's world.

At the Icahn School of Medicine, we are resolute in our pursuit of new scientific knowledge that will unlock novel ways to conquer disease. We have drafted a bold strategic plan for re-search that will advance our clinical care and education enterprises.

- We plan to rewrite disease classifications that will fully encompass the entire spec-trum of human clinical data.
- We will use this new diagnostic knowledge to drive precision treatments and cures for our patients based on the underlying biology of their individual illness. This will include gene- and cell-based therapies, regenerative medicine, and innovative surgi-cal procedures.
- Our newly gained knowledge will also make it increasingly possible to prevent dis-ease in the first place. We call this proactive precision medicine.

Today, we also face challenges to our social values of providing equal opportunity for every-one in all we do.

Let us remember our roots. The Mount Sinai Hospital was founded 170 years ago to provide care to those who were turned away elsewhere because of their religious faith, and to em-ploy talented health professionals who also faced discrimination.

It is in our institutional DNA to combat bias, promote health equity, and create opportunity. We are proud of our track record of welcoming people from all backgrounds, and giving eve-ryone the tools to thrive. We will continue to abide by these guiding principles.

Class of 2025, as you embark on your exciting careers as doctors and scientists, it will be up to your generation to push science and medicine forward, to devise fundamentally new paradigms both for scientific research and for clinical care delivery, and to ensure that eve-ryone receives the optimal care they deserve.

Let's be undaunted by the difficulties that confront science and medicine at this moment and instead be energized by today's challenges!

We will be resilient, a trait that Dean Charney has instilled in us.

Science will prevail. Our knowledge will keep growing at an accelerating pace. The practice of medicine will become ever more powerful in helping humanity.

I am supremely confident that, as our newest alumni, you will always be proud that your al-ma mater continues to drive—with our characteristic boldness and creativity—advances in science and medicine into this still-new century.

Thank you and congratulations!