



Icahn  
School of  
Medicine at  
Mount  
Sinai

## COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS 2025

**DENNIS S. CHARNEY, MD**

**ICAHN SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AT MOUNT SINAI**

Parents and grandparents, family and friends, Trustees and faculty, and Class of 2025, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to the 56th Commencement Ceremony of the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai.

Like you, this is a special moment for me. This is my last Commencement address as your Dean.

Class of 2025, the torch is being passed to you as the next generation of leaders in medicine and science.

Why do I know this to be true?

### **I know this because I am aware of your accomplishments:**

- You have made important scientific discoveries relevant to understanding human disease.
- You are passionate advocates for human rights and equal opportunity for everyone.
- You have shown exceptional promise to become great physicians.
- And, as physicians, I know you will be the healer your patients and their families need and deserve.
- And I know you will do everything possible for your patients when conventional treatment fails.

As scientists, I know you will be bold and challenge convention.

And I know you will make discoveries that convert diseases that are deadly today to be treatable tomorrow.

It is a fact, however, being a physician is tough...

You will face situations when you cannot heal a patient, or worse, where you cannot save a patient. You will need to demonstrate compassion, strength of purpose, and moral courage.

And those of you who pursue scientific research will face great challenges. It is hard – very hard – to discover new knowledge. You will experience disappointment along the way as you try to make scientific breakthroughs. You may even experience skepticism and ridicule. Do not let it stop you. Do not give up.

What matters is how you meet disappointment and failure—which is far more important than how you embrace success. To thrive, personally and professionally, you will have to accept disappointment and failure, learn from it, and move forward.

Winston Churchill said: “Success is not final. Failure is not fatal. It is the courage to continue that counts.”

Because being a doctor and scientist is hard, it can take a personal toll. So, as important as it is to care for your patients, you must also care for yourself. You cannot pour from an empty cup. So, I want to remind you to constantly build your resilience skills to keep your cup full. You will have challenges in your personal life... health issues, family crisis, uncontrollable stress from the world around you.

### **So, here, for a final time, are a few reminders from my resilience prescription:**

- Maintain a positive attitude.
- Allow yourself to reappraise highly stressful, even traumatic events; Put them in proper perspective.
- Nurture your supportive social network.  
You cannot go it alone.
- Seek role models.
- Take care of your physical well-being.
- Embrace your personal moral compass.

Our school has faced hurdles along the way.

In 2003, the financial foundation of Mount Sinai was at risk. Just four years later, the Great Recession posed yet another financial challenge. We faced Hurricane Sandy. And the COVID-19 pandemic was our greatest health crisis in more than a century.

Today, we face new challenges, to our cherished values of equal opportunity for all as well as cutbacks in funding from the National Institutes of Health.

Yes, these are challenges, but we have prevailed in the past. And we shall prevail again.

Being your Dean over the past 18 years has been one of the great joys of my life—my own research has thrived, I have witnessed the awesome accomplishments of our students, the leadership of our brilliant faculty, celebrated our scientific breakthroughs and the cures we have delivered for so many patients locally and around the world.

During this time there have been many joys in my personal life. I have much to be thankful for. All of my 9 grandchildren have been born during those 18 years.

But, like all of us, I have also experienced stress and sadness, including in my personal life.

- One of our grandchildren was lost to a rare genetic disorder.
- I was shot. It was an attempt to murder me.
- I have become a cancer survivor.

Yes, I have experienced all these challenges, but they have made me a stronger person.

Ernest Hemingway understood this when he wrote, “The world breaks everyone, and afterward, some are strong at the broken places.”

Like all of us, life will throw you curveballs. But I know you will be strong in the broken places.

So, this is a bittersweet moment for me. I will be moving on to our faculty as a mentor and scientist.

But be assured, like you, I will be “working on a dream.”

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I am now delighted to introduce my successor: Chief Scientific Officer of the Mount Sinai Health System and Dean for Academic Affairs, who will now also add the title of Interim Dean of the Icahn School of Medicine—my longtime friend and colleague, Dr. Eric Nestler.