



Icahn
School of
Medicine at
Mount
Sinai

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS 2014

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Mount Sinai Students, Physicians, and Scientists meet Today's Health Care Challenges through Strength of Character and the Virtues of Compassion, Integrity, Creativity, Justice, and Courage.

Family Members, Trustees, Faculty, Alumni, Honored Guests, and Class of 2014, Welcome to the 45th Commencement of the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai.

Commencement is a day of remembrance and gratitude and a celebration of accomplishments.

Class of 2014, please stand and show your appreciation to your family and friends who helped you reach today's pinnacle of success.

Let us please have a moment of silence to remember those who meant so much to our graduates, but are no longer with us on this momentous day.

Never before have the Challenges and Opportunities in Health Care and Biomedical Research been so great.

The revolution in Health Care associated with the Affordable Care Act will provide Health Care to more Americans. It is built upon the premise, which Mount Sinai strongly supports, that access to excellent Health Care is a human right.

However, the act also calls for providing high quality Health Care at lower costs, with an emphasis on population health. The potential exists to change medical practice patterns by deemphasizing small practices in favor of large multidisciplinary practice groups, perhaps leading to a depersonalized patient-physician relationship.

Fundamental shifts will occur in how you deliver care to your patients over the next decade, and your challenge will be to lead, rather than react to those innovations.

The physician of 2024 may have half of his or her patient encounters virtually; advances in personal biometric devices, in communications technology, and analysis of the flood of data that can come from these sources will allow the patient to interact efficiently and quickly with his or her physician.

More than ever, we need to emphasize synergy between the humanities and science. A case can be made that medicine is the most scientific of the humanities and most humane of the sciences.

As such, it falls to us – to you, class of 2014 – to uphold the core principles of this ancient tradition in a world its founders would find unrecognizable. It falls upon you, the next generation of medical doctors and scientists, to preserve the special time-honored bond between physician and patient, to preserve, in the immortal words of Hippocrates, “the practice of the art, respected by all men, in all times!”

Of course, we must take full advantage of the discoveries of human genetics and molecular medicine that promise disease prevention, more accurate diagnosis, and more precise, effective therapies.

The opportunities in biomedical research are unprecedented with spectacular advances in technology and increased understanding of disease etiology and therapeutics..... Yet, with the inflation-adjusted reductions in NIH funding, currently 90% of all meritorious

grant applications are rejected. It has never, in the history of the National Institutes of Health, been more difficult to

obtain research funding, especially for young investigators.

So, Class of 2014, scientists and physicians, are you prepared to meet these challenges?

The computer scientist, Randy Pausch, who bravely fought pancreatic cancer, wrote in his best-selling book, *The Last Lecture*,

“The brick walls are there for a reason. The brick walls are not there to keep us out. The brick walls are there to give us a chance to show how badly we want something. Because the brick walls are there to stop the people who don't want it badly enough. They're there to stop the other people.”

Mount Sinai physicians and scientists have been knocking down the brick walls of prejudice and access to care, and unlocking the mysteries of human health and disease for over 160 years.

And Mount Sinai students, physicians and scientists have always been defined by strength of character and virtues such as....

COMPASSION, INTEGRITY, CREATIVITY, JUSTICE, AND COURAGE

COMPASSION

Compassion is the essence of outstanding practice. The degree to which we relate to our patients and share their lived experience is directly related to their capacity to heal, to recover, to believe that the profession of medicine has lived up to their expectations. Never losing sight of your patients' humanity is the most important ingredient to a lifetime of clinical practice. It is also arguably your greatest challenge.

Here is an example of the compassion of the Class of 2014.

To honor National Solidarity Day for Compassionate Patient Care, 26 medical students conducted interviews at The Mount Sinai Hospital to learn about patients, asking

How would your friends describe you?

What are your strengths?

What has been the most meaningful experience in your life?

The students were humbled by their patients' resilience and believed their interactions facilitated healing....

What was the impact on the relationship between our medical students and the patients?

One student noted,

“One patient jotted down my name to put me on her list of people she prays for every day. She told me she would pray for me every day for the rest of her life.”

INTEGRITY

Admiral James Stockdale, POW, Medal of Honor recipient wrote,

“You can’t buy it or sell it.... A person’s integrity is something to rely on when perspective seems to blur, when rules and principles seem to waver, and when one is faced with hard choices of right and wrong.”

Integrity is central to patient trust and to the healing process. The physician must be a person of integrity to protect wellbeing and promote recovery in patients wracked by illness.

And, Integrity is an absolute requirement in the conduct of Scientific Research. E.O. Wilson, the father of sociobiology, wrote in his book, Letters to a Young Scientist,

“Remember you enter a career in science, above all, in pursuit of the truth.”

Don’t be too wedded to your scientific hypothesis in your search for the truth. As noted by the Nobel Laureate Sir Peter Medawar, in Advice to a Young Scientist

“The intensity of the conviction that your hypothesis is true has no bearing on whether it is true or not.”

CREATIVITY

Highly creative persons tend to be independent, have wide interests, greater openness to new experiences, and boldness when it comes to risk taking.

This is an apt description of the Class of 2014.

Let me give you some examples:

- A team of students recently won the highly prestigious Emory Global Health Case Competition Award for Innovation.
- The thesis work of one of our graduating MD/PhD students provided key foundational discoveries for the development of a “universal” influenza vaccine that may lead to far more effective vaccination procedures that are currently in practice.
- A PhD student graduating this year, was chosen by Forbes as one of the 30 most influential scientists under 30 years of age. She finished her PhD in 3 years, making seminal discoveries on viral microRNAs.
- A group of students won an award in the Columbia Engineering Venture Competition, receiving \$15,000 to support their project to develop an in-home diagnostic for neutropenia.
- And finally, there was the flash mob at Match Day... Need I say more about the Creativity of the Class of 2014?

SOCIAL JUSTICE

The pioneering bioethicist, Edmund Pellegrino has written

“Medicine is a moral community because it is at heart a moral enterprise and its members are bound together by a common moral purpose”

At its Core, Mount Sinai has been and always will be a moral community – bound by unbreakable standards and principles.

The Class of 2014 has admirably stayed true to Mount Sinai’s moral compass.

- The Class celebrated the 10th Anniversary of East Harlem Health Outreach Partnership (EHHOP) and expanded its programs

- Had a huge hand in the Hurricane Sandy medical response teams
- Developed innovative programs in surgical global health following Haiti relief efforts

COURAGE

“Courage is the greatest of all virtues because if you haven’t courage, you may not have the opportunity to use any of the others.” Samuel Johnson

Class of 2014, clinicians, you will need courage to resist the temptation to do what’s easy as opposed to doing what’s right. You will need courage to go above and beyond the call of duty to help your sickest patients and to support them when the end of life is near.

Class of 2014, scientists, you will need courage to break the chains of tradition by challenging convention, taking risks, and accepting and learning from failure in order to achieve life changing scientific breakthroughs.

Concluding Comment

Class of 2014, as you embark on careers destined to lead the next generation of physicians and scientists, remember the words of Christopher Reeve,

“So many of our dreams, at first seem impossible, then they seem improbable, and then when we summon the will, they soon become inevitable.”

So, from this time and place, start heeding the call of that great New Jersey philosopher, “Start Working on that Dream”.