



COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS, 2009

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MOUNT SINAI
SCHOOL OF
MEDICINE

Welcome and Congratulations..

"I accept responsibility for my chosen profession and way of life. It is a privilege I must earn every day. I humbly serve as a guardian to my fellow Americans, always ready to defend those who are unable to defend themselves. I do not advertise the nature of my work, nor seek recognition of my actions. I voluntarily accept the inherent hazards of my profession, placing the welfare of others before my own. I persevere and thrive on adversity. I will never quit. My training is never complete."

These inspirational and instructive words are excerpts from the United States Navy SEALs creed.

We may never know the identity of those heroic Navy SEALs who saved Captain Phillips, from the pirates in the middle of the night, on rough seas, with no room for error, but their actions and those principles may serve as a role model for medicine and biomedical science.

Never before in my 30 plus years as a physician and scientist have the challenges and opportunities presented by our local community, our society, and our country been greater.

The economic crisis, which has affected all of us, was precipitated, in part, by a culture of greed and lack of accountability. Our own profession has been plagued by violations of the public trust because of inattention to real and perceived conflicts of interests.

Our country is poised for healthcare reform—that is decades overdue. It is shameful for over 40 million Americans to be without healthcare coverage and that disparities in healthcare quality continue to persist.

Despite increased knowledge of the biology of the human body and enormous potential associated with the sequencing of the human genome, the pace of scientific discovery related to better treatments for human disease has been disappointingly slow. The number of new drugs approved by the FDA last year, with the potential for therapeutic breakthrough was the lowest in 25 years.

So, what is needed to solve these daunting problems? The MOUNT SINAI GRADUATE!

Graduates of our medical and graduate schools are known throughout the world for their technical expertise, scientific discoveries, and leadership.

But it is other virtues that Mount Sinai and the Mount Sinai graduate stand for that distinguish us. These virtues guide us and allow us to be agents of change in this age of uncertainty and doubt.

One is Altruism

The philosopher, Descartes recognized generosity, selflessness, and altruism as measures of strength, freedom, and resilience—

"You are your brother's keeper."

Students who are prepared to give of themselves self select to attend Mount Sinai and we try to provide every opportunity for growth—whether it is the student run clinic for East Harlem residents or providing badly needed medical supplies to developing countries. And we provide them role models such as David Muller, our Dean of Medical Education, who won the *2009 AMA Foundation Award for Humanism in Medicine*.

Another is Moral Values

Moral values are not easily acquired because they require courage. Rushmore Kidder, who directs the Institute for Global Ethics, defines moral courage as standing up for values in the face of opposition and danger. The quality of mind and spirit that enables one to face up to ethical challenges firmly and confidently. Moral courage serves as the backbone of all great virtues. Samuel Johnson described it as the greatest of all human virtues.

Are moral values and moral courage innate or can they be taught? We believe strongly that they can be taught and we do it—through discourse and discussion, through role modeling of our great physicians and scientists, and most importantly, through practice and persistence to solidify action into character. At the beginning of their training our students are introduced to the Mount Sinai Honor Code. The Code forms the initial foundation for professional ethical behavior that will stand them in good stead throughout their career.

I started these remarks with the creed of the United States Navy SEALs. In times of trouble and danger, we count on these skilled virtuous individuals to protect us.

In much the same way, I can assure you that many of our graduates in this room will remake the image of the American Physician—one who is more committed, more selfless, and more ethical.

Many of our graduates in this room will devote their professional life to the less fortunate—and provide leadership in reforming our healthcare system to provide equal care to all Americans.

And many of our graduates in this room today will be leaders, in what we believe, will be a generation of unprecedented discovery that will fundamentally change the practice of medicine – Cancer will be a chronic and not terminal disease, Heart Disease will be prevented and cured, Mental Illness will be free of stigma and better understood and treated, and there will be so much more.

That is why, today, I am so proud of the 2009 graduates of Mount Sinai School of Medicine!