Aspiring Physicians Start Their Medical Education

Before a standing-room-only audience of well-wishers, 140 medical students of the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Class of 2023 received symbolic white coats during a rousing ceremony held Tuesday, September 17, in Stern Auditorium.

Always a jubilant affair for the students and their families and friends, and for Mount Sinai Health System leadership, faculty, and alumni, this year’s event was marked by frequent applause as speakers brought special attention to key issues in medical education and health care.

After receiving their white coats, the aspiring physicians also recited a student oath they wrote—a set of principles to guide them. They committed to be innovative collaborators, to push medicine to new heights, and to courageously advocate for patients and their communities, among other ideals.

In attendance were Richard A. Friedman and James S. Tisch, Co-Chairmen of the Mount Sinai Health System Boards of Trustees. “The Trustees care deeply about you, our students,” said Mr. Friedman in welcoming remarks. “We want you to be able to learn without the anxiety of graduating with a financial burden that might severely limit your ability to pursue your dreams. So, earlier this year, the Boards of Trustees approved the Enhanced Scholarship Initiative that enables students with demonstrated need to graduate with no more than $75,000 of debt. This is a gift from the Trustees who have funded the Initiative.”

Mount Sinai Taking the Lead In Transgender Medicine

The Mount Sinai Center for Transgender Medicine and Surgery (CTMS) in three years has become a world leader in the care and support of transgender people, a journey that is the subject of Born to Be, a documentary that premiered on Saturday, September 28, at the 57th New York Film Festival. “CTMS has treated 2,500 transgender patients since it was founded in 2016 and performed 1,200 ‘trans-related’ surgeries, such as facial feminization and genital reconstruction,” says Joshua Safer, MD, Executive Director of the Center for Transgender Medicine and Surgery, and Professor of Medicine (Endocrinology, Diabetes and Bone Disease), Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. The Center also offers

In a documentary about the Mount Sinai Center for Transgender Medicine and Surgery, its Director of Surgery, Jess Ting, MD, center, headed for an operating room with Adriana Macias, RN, and patient Mahogany Phillips.
A Special Lab Coat Ceremony Launches the Training of Future Scientists

The 56 members of the matriculating classes of PhD and MD/PhD students in the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai received white lab coats during a special ceremony held Monday, September 9, in Goldwurm Auditorium.

“It is with great pride and joy that I welcome you,” Marta Filizola, PhD, Dean of the Graduate School, and the Sharon and Frederick Klingenstein/Nathan Kase, MD Professor of Pharmacological Sciences, and Professor of Neuroscience, told the students. “This ceremony serves as a symbolic induction to your professional PhD training in the Biomedical Sciences and Neuroscience programs, as well as to the MD/PhD Medical Scientist Training Program.” The Graduate School, which began the tradition in 2018, is the only institution in New York City, and one of a few in the nation, to honor its matriculating PhD classes in this manner.

Also receiving recognition were 43 PhD and MD/PhD students who have officially joined a lab and confirmed their PhD candidature by passing their thesis proposal exams. They were presented with honorary plaques.

The PhD students recited an oath to guide them through their training, and beyond. In part, they pledged to uphold the highest levels of integrity, professionalism, scholarship, and honor, and to conduct their research and professional endeavors with honesty and objectivity.

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Dennis S. Charney, MD, Anne and Joel Ehrenkranz Dean of the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, and President for Academic Affairs for the Mount Sinai Health System, spoke eloquently of gifts of a different sort. “It is important that you be thankful for all the gifts that are associated with becoming a physician and scientist,” he told the students. “It will enrich your personal life, enhance your professional sense of purpose, and most importantly, improve the lives of patients who place their trust in you.”

Among the gifts, he said, are the gifts of family, of gratitude, of giving and showing compassion to patients, of solving life’s greatest challenges, and of demonstrating strength, courage, and resilience while under duress. “Perhaps your ultimate gift,” he concluded, “is the chance to dream big.”

Kenneth L. Davis, MD, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Mount Sinai Health System, took the opportunity to urge the future physicians to uphold and advance the values that have defined Mount Sinai since its earliest days—values, he said, that are now being threatened.

“The federal government has released a rule that could deny permanent resident status to some immigrants if they accept government assistance, including Medicaid, food stamps, or housing assistance, all of which we know impacts a person’s health and well-being,” he began. “In accepting federal government assistance, these individuals and families risk being labeled as a ‘public charge,’ and under this rule, it would jeopardize their ability to remain in the United States.”

As a result, Dr. Davis continued, immigrant and low-income families served by Mount Sinai are choosing to forgo health care to avoid possible deportation.

“How does that affect you, future physicians and researchers? This is what I want you to commit to when you leave this room: We must defend our ability to be health care providers for all. By accepting your white coat today, you are pledging to uphold our values and to fulfill Mount Sinai’s vision.”

Zara Cooper, MD, MSc, FACS, MSSM ’00, Kessler Director of the Center for Surgery and Public Health at Brigham and Women’s Hospital, gave a heartfelt keynote speech, which each year is dedicated to the late Hans Popper, MD, PhD, a world-renowned physician and academic leader who was President and Dean Emeritus of the Mount Sinai School of Medicine.

“It’s hard to describe the gratification of saving a patient’s life, helping bring a new life into the world, making a patient’s life longer or more enjoyable, or easing their transition to death,” she told the medical
Future Scientists

your future than the content of the lab's work or the experimental approaches the lab utilizes. If it works as it should, your lab mentor will be one of your more significant relationships of your professional lives.”

When keynote speaker Francesca Cole, PhD, stepped to the podium, she almost immediately acknowledged her own mentor, Robert S. Krauss, PhD, Professor of Cell, Developmental and Regenerative Biology, and Oncological Sciences, at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, who was in attendance. Dr. Cole received a PhD in Biomedical Sciences in 2005 at Mount Sinai, followed by postgraduate training at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, and today she is an Associate Professor of Epigenetics and Molecular Carcinogenesis at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center.

She outlined the struggles of a typical scientist. “We have to live with the knowledge that we could be wrong, that our approach may not work, that we may not be asking the right question. In short, doing research makes you feel stupid,” said Dr. Cole. “You must accept this. If you don’t feel that way, you aren’t working hard enough or pushing the boundaries of our knowledge enough.”

Dr. Cole also encouraged the students to select a mentor wisely and to support each other. “But this is my most important message to you,” she said. “It is abundantly clear that you all belong here. So, welcome to biomedical research, and let’s make beautiful science together.”

students. “You will do each of these things before you leave here. You will witness extraordinary things. You will experience the greatest joy and satisfaction that life can offer, and the deepest regret, shame, sadness, and self-doubt. But through it all, what will keep you centered, what will help you maintain your ethical compass, avoid burnout, maintain hope and optimism and joy in this work, is that you must always do what is best for the patient—always, always, always.”

New Name for a Flagship: Mount Sinai South Nassau

South Nassau Communities Hospital—a 90-year-old institution that serves 900,000 residents on the South Shore of Long Island—will now operate as Mount Sinai South Nassau to reflect its partnership with the Mount Sinai Health System.

Mount Sinai and South Nassau announced their plan to establish a partnership in January 2018 and received New York State regulatory approval in December 2018. During the past two years, administrative and clinical leaders have worked to combine the Mount Sinai Health System’s academic, clinical, and research expertise with the award-winning community-based care of Mount Sinai South Nassau. “The rebranding reflects a shared vision and collective goal to provide the highest quality of care to patients on Long Island,” says Arthur A. Klein, MD, President of the Mount Sinai Health Network.

Mount Sinai South Nassau is one of the region’s largest hospitals, with 455 beds, more than 900 physicians, and 3,500 employees. It has added new services that are growing rapidly, such as maternal fetal medicine, interventional endoscopy, and pediatric cardiology, and plans to expand its cardiac surgery, cancer care, neuroscience, and colon and rectal surgery programs. Mount Sinai South Nassau is in the midst of a $400 million long-term strategic growth initiative that will transform its campuses in Oceanside and Long Beach, New York.

Richard J. Murphy, President and Chief Executive Officer of Mount Sinai South Nassau, says, “While the hospital has a new name, our legacy of serving this community and providing patients with extraordinary health care will only grow stronger as a result of our partnership with Mount Sinai.”
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services in primary care, physical therapy, endocrinology, behavioral health, and social work that are uniquely comprehensive.

“The one thing that transgender people have in common is that their gender identity is not aligned with the physical anatomy that we see,” Dr. Safer says. “But there is great variability in what they want to do about that, and we think patients should have customized choices, just like treatment for any other medical circumstance.”

The new documentary, directed by Tania Cypriano, focuses on five patients seeking to transform their lives with surgery performed by Jess Ting, MD, Director of Surgery, Center for Transgender Medicine and Surgery, and Assistant Professor of Surgery (Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery), Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. They were a varied group, including a self-described survivor of the 1980s drag ball culture, a young professional, and a former model. One patient seemed to speak for many in describing life before the surgery. “You are fighting every day,” he said. “You are fighting to be respected, you are fighting to be comfortable in your own skin.”

The film depicts CTMS in its early days, when Dr. Ting was just transitioning into his role. Since then, Dr. Ting created the nation’s first transgender surgery fellowship and hired the first two graduates of the program. “One new surgeon is coming out of this program every year,” Dr. Ting says. “Over time, we will be able to multiply our expertise and our ability to address health care disparities for transgender patients.”

CTMS has also added two luminaries in gender-affirming surgery: Marci Bowers, MD, a San Francisco-based pioneer in vaginoplasty, and Miroslav Djordjevic, MD, PhD, a specialist in female-to-male genital surgery who leads the Belgrade Center for Genital Reconstructive Surgery in Serbia. Both teach and practice at Mount Sinai several times a year.

“These collaborations build upon an already strong program and make CTMS a world leader in gender-affirming surgery,” Dr. Ting says.

In other innovations, CTMS created the first psychiatric fellowship in transgender medicine, and is now training its second fellow. In addition, all endocrine fellows and plastic surgery residents rotate through the transgender program, making Mount Sinai one of the only centers to incorporate the care of transgender and nonbinary patients into its physician training curriculum.

Leveraging its resources as a large academic medical center, Mount Sinai is taking the lead in efforts to elevate and standardize important aspects of patient care, including the training of nurses, physical therapy for patients undergoing genital surgery, and the pre- and postsurgery process. To create a national conversation on best practices, CTMS held the first Live Surgery Conference for Gender Affirmation Procedures in spring 2018, co-sponsored by Mount Sinai and the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH), the leading professional and educational organization for transgender health care. The second such conference, in spring 2019, held panels on social and ethical issues in transgender care and featured live surgeries by experts, including Dr. Ting, Dr. Bowers, and Dr. Djordjevic. CTMS plans another conference in spring 2020 focusing on medical issues such as perioperative care and adolescent health.

“CTMS has become a national model for providing a full-service and integrated system of affirmative patient-centered care, accessible to all transgender and nonbinary patients,” says Barbara Warren, PsyD, Director, LGBT Programs and Policies, Office for Diversity and Inclusion, Mount Sinai Health System. “It also serves as a much-needed resource for educating the next generation of health care providers in culturally and clinically competent care.”

David L. Reich, MD, President and Chief Operating Officer, The Mount Sinai Hospital, who was a driving force in creating CTMS along with Dr. Warren, says: “In so many areas of medicine, we tend to be competitive. In gender affirmation surgery and transgender medicine, however, we need to think broadly to support a community that has for so long been underserved. Our mission and our vision is to bring the care of the community to the next level by sharing our expertise.”

From left: Garnet Rubio, Jordan Rubenstein, and Mahogany Phillips, three Mount Sinai patients who were featured in Born to Be, attended a screening of the documentary at the 57th New York Film Festival.
In 2017, Jeannie Gaffigan, a popular director, producer, and comedy writer, urgently needed to consult with a neurosurgeon. An MRI had revealed that the seemingly harmless symptoms that she had been experiencing, and ignoring for at least a year—including headaches, dizzy spells, and loss of hearing in one ear—were the result of a massive, life-threatening brain tumor, pushing against her brainstem. Ms. Gaffigan, the mother of five children with her husband, comedian Jim Gaffigan, feared she was going to die.

Joshua B. Bederson, MD, Professor and Chair of Neurosurgery for the Mount Sinai Health System, reassured her that he could perform complex surgery and safely remove the tumor. In a 10-hour operation, Dr. Bederson and his team—relying on years of experience combined with advanced augmented reality technologies—were able to precisely see the brain’s delicate structures, allowing Dr. Bederson to systematically separate each of the nerves and myriad blood vessels from the 6-cm pear-shaped choroid plexus papilloma, a rare type of slow-growing benign tumor.

Now, in a book that was released this month, When Life Gives You Pears, Ms. Gaffigan recounts—with characteristic humor—her extraordinary medical journey at Mount Sinai, acknowledging those who provided her with expert and compassionate care.

There are many people involved with a patient’s neurosurgical care beyond the surgeon,” says Dr. Bederson. “In Jeannie’s case, she was helped not only by me and my immediate team, but also by neuroendovascular surgeons, neurocritical care staff, pulmonologists, otolaryngologists, physiatrists, physical therapists, and others.”

Leslie C. Schlachter, PA-C, the Department of Neurosurgery’s Chief Physician Assistant and Clinical Director, played a significant role in guiding Ms. Gaffigan through the surgical process and coordinating care across specialties. “Our relationship continues to this day with intermittent text messages where I assure her that she is on the road to an excellent recovery,” says Ms. Schlachter.

After surgery, Ms. Gaffigan spent a period of time in The Mount Sinai Hospital’s Neurosurgery Intensive Care Unit (NSICU), and she later required more hospitalization and a prolonged period of rehabilitation. Says Neha S. Dangayach, MD, MSCR, Assistant Professor of Neurosurgery, and Neurology, and Co-Director of the NSICU, “Because Jeannie’s surgery was very complex, she required extensive neurocritical care to help her embark on the perfect trajectory for a successful recovery.” Dr. Dangayach adds, “I commend Jeannie for being a great team player, for her sense of humor, and exceptional patience with us. I also commend our team of neurointensivists, fellows, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, specialty-trained nurses, and rehabilitation specialists for providing her exceptional care throughout her weeks-long stay.”
**SINA Innovations** Week Events

### 8th Annual SINA Innovations

**Leading a New Era of Discovery**

Theme: *Artificial Intelligence*

**Tuesday, October 15, and Wednesday, October 16**

Annenberg, Stern Auditorium

https://inside.mountsinai.org/sinainnovations/

Registration is free but required.

### 4th Annual Mount Sinai Health Hackathon

**Creating Novel Technology Solutions For Health Care**

Theme: *Artificial Intelligence—Expanding The Limits of Human Performance*

**Friday, October 11 - Sunday, October 13**

Hess Center for Science and Medicine

https://inside.mountsinai.org/health-hackathon/

Registration is $10

### The Diversity Innovation Hub

The Office for Diversity and Inclusion
Patricia S. Levinson Center for Multicultural and Community Affairs

**Monday, October 14**

1:30 pm

Hess Center for Science and Medicine

https://dihub.co

### Careers & Connections 2019

A **SINA Innovations** event for students, trainees, and postdocs

**Tuesday, October 15**

3 - 7 pm

Hess Center for Science and Medicine


### Disability Awareness Fairs

In recognition of Disability Awareness Month in October, the Office for Diversity and Inclusion will host two Disability Awareness Fairs. These informational events are designed to educate and connect faculty, staff, students, and the community to organizations and resources dedicated to the care of people with disabilities. All are welcome to attend. For more information, email diversity@mountsinai.org.

**Wednesday, October 16**

11 am - 2 pm

Mount Sinai St. Luke’s Main Lobby

**Thursday, October 24**

11 am - 3 pm

The Mount Sinai Hospital Guggenheim Pavilion

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**New Master of Health Administration Program Now Accepting Applications**

**Applications are now open for the Master of Health Administration (MHA) program that is launching in 2020 at the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai.**

Health administration is evolving at a rapid pace—opening up a vast array of professional opportunities for highly motivated people looking to make a positive impact. This MHA program was specifically created to give health care administrators new and adaptable skills in strategic thinking, systems operation and process, policy creation, and management to navigate the demands of a complex health care marketplace.

Submit a completed application for enrollment in January, March, or September 2020 at https://icahn.mssm.edu/education/masters/healthcare-administration. To learn more about all of Mount Sinai’s Master’s programs, go to https://icahn.mssm.edu/education/masters.

### Mount Sinai Transformation Update

For the most recent updates on Mount Sinai’s downtown transformation, please go to:

http://www.mountsinai.org/locations/downtown

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