Noble Deeds Society Honors a Mount Sinai Legend

At the Noble Deeds Society Dinner last fall, leaders at the Mount Sinai Health System expressed their heartfelt appreciation to Peter W. May for his remarkable 17-year tenure as Chairman of the Boards of Trustees, during which he transformed a nearly bankrupt hospital and medical school into one of the world's premier academic medical centers. Mr. May officially stepped down as Chairman in spring 2019 and now serves as Chairman Emeritus, Boards of Trustees. The Noble Deeds Society of the Mount Sinai Health System honors those who have been significant supporters and preserve the tradition of philanthropy.

“There could not be a more appropriate place to recognize Peter than at this dinner for noble deeds, because no one has done a more noble deed for Mount Sinai than Peter during his tenure,” said Kenneth L. Davis, MD, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Mount Sinai Health System, in a video that was presented at the event held at the Rainbow Room at Rockefeller Center.

Approximately 200 generous supporters—including the Mount Sinai Health System’s current Co-Chairmen, Boards of Trustees, Richard A. Friedman and James S. Tisch—attended the dinner. Mr. Friedman and Mr. Tisch credited Mr. May for his deep knowledge, confidence, commitment, and inspirational leadership. They said trustees urged Mr. May to serve additional terms while he was Chairman and that he successfully convinced other philanthropists to join him in supporting Mount Sinai’s mission. Mr. May joined the Mount Sinai Boards of Trustees in 1989.

Enhancing Early Brain Development in Children

A partnership between Mount Sinai Kravis Children's Hospital and the Bezos Family Foundation aims to transform pediatric health care through an innovative program that provides science-based tips, tools, and activities to enhance a child's early brain development during the critical years from birth to age five. The effort, a collaboration with the Mount Sinai Parenting Center, is based on a core premise—that everyday interactions between a child and a parent, caregiver, or health care providers can be turned into an opportunity to build cognition and language skills, and help form strong interpersonal relationships. It is the cornerstone of an early learning program, known as Vroom, that was developed by the Bezos Family Foundation.

“In a child’s early years, the brain makes more than 1 million neural connections on average each second, which means every moment you spend with a child is an opportunity for brain-building activities,” says Carrie Quinn, MD, Assistant Clinical Professor of Pediatrics, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, and Executive Director of Mount Sinai Kravis Children’s Hospital.
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The Mount Sinai Parenting Center. “The health care environment offers a unique opportunity to reach parents during these formative years.”

The Parenting Center has saturated hallways, elevators, and exam rooms—in the prenatal, labor and delivery, postpartum, and neonatal intensive care units; and in the pediatric emergency department and the pediatric clinic—with easy-to-read signs that serve as canvases to convey more than 500 messages about parenting. “This prompts everyone to think about how they can make each interaction more meaningful, whether you are a parent in a waiting room, a pediatrician doing a consultation, or a security guard who is the first to greet families and typically the last person to say goodbye,” says Aliza Pressman, PhD, the Parenting Center’s Co-Founding Director and Director of Clinical Programming, and Assistant Clinical Professor of Pediatrics at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai.

“From using a sing-song voice called ‘Parentese’ while changing a diaper, to modeling back-and-forth conversations with toddlers, each moment becomes an opportunity to promote healthy brain development,” adds Blair Hammond, MD, Co-Founding Director and Director of Medical Education for the Parenting Center, and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai.

“...The science we have funded for more than a decade clearly shows that children's early development is dependent on parents and other caring adults in their lives,” says Mike Bezos, Vice President and Co-Founder of the Bezos Family Foundation. “Health care professionals like those at the Mount Sinai Parenting Center are natural partners.”

Adds Kenneth L. Davis, MD, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Mount Sinai Health System, “Mount Sinai has long recognized that the health of any child goes well beyond the immediate concerns that families present with and that we must always be holistic in our approach to facilitate their development and put them on a path of lifelong well-being.”

The initiative also offers a training component that includes video, e-learning, and in-person classroom support for all staff in the designated units to ensure they are well-equipped to apply the fundamentals of brain development science in their interactions with children and parents. More than 1,000 faculty and staff will be trained in clinical disciplines, such as Nursing and Social Work, an effort that also includes staff in nonclinical areas, such as Housekeeping, Patient Transport, and Security. The potential to influence thousands of children and their families is great. Each year, there are more than 50,000 primary care and emergency room visits, and more than 8,000 babies born at Kravis Children’s Hospital.

This initiative is the latest innovative effort by the Parenting Center. In 2018, it launched a pilot program with eight hospitals, including The Mount Sinai Hospital, to offer a free online curriculum for residents that integrates the science of early childhood development with pediatric training, teaching residents how to better inform, encourage, and interact with parents during well-child visits. Developed in partnership with Mind in the Making, a program of the Bezos Family Foundation, 76 hospitals around the nation have offered the curriculum to date, and an estimated 1,900 residents have enrolled.
Mount Sinai has become one of the few health systems in the nation to offer a new minimally invasive procedure to treat noncancerous thyroid nodules. The procedure, called radiofrequency ablation (RFA), offers eligible patients a quicker recovery and minimal scarring, with preservation of surrounding healthy thyroid tissue.

Catherine Sinclair, MD, Associate Professor of Otolaryngology, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, and Director of Head and Neck Surgery at Mount Sinai West, performed Mount Sinai’s first RFA procedures in August 2019. “I truly believe this procedure will change management and improve outcomes for a subset of patients with symptomatic, noncancerous thyroid nodules,” says Dr. Sinclair. Mount Sinai is also a leader in offering ethanol ablation, a similarly noninvasive procedure.

Thyroid nodules are masses composed of tissue or fluid, or both, that form in the thyroid, a butterfly-shaped gland near the front of the lower neck. Nodules are very common, estimated to be present in 50 percent of those aged 50 and older. More than 95 percent are noncancerous, and most require no intervention. “For noncancerous thyroid nodules, we intervene surgically or with RFA only if the nodules are very large or symptomatic,” Dr. Sinclair explains. “Symptoms may include neck discomfort, neck swelling, difficulty swallowing or breathing, or changes in the voice from pressure on the nerve to the larynx.”

Although invasive surgery is the most common management option, RFA is an important consideration for patients with noncancerous nodules, Dr. Sinclair says. With RFA, surgeons use guided ultrasound to deliver radiofrequency current to heat the thyroid nodule, which shrinks significantly over the next several months. Patients who undergo RFA can return to normal activity the next day and exercise normally within several days, compared with several weeks for patients who undergo standard thyroid surgery. In addition, RFA targets only the nodule, compared with traditional surgery, which usually removes one side of the thyroid and makes lifelong hormone supplements necessary for 20 to 30 percent of patients.

“Radiofrequency ablation for thyroid nodules has been performed in Korea for over a decade and throughout Europe, and their outcomes are excellent. The published data show nodule shrinkage rates of more than 80 percent with RFA that is maintained over years of follow-up,” says Dr. Sinclair, who learned RFA from a pioneer in the field, Jung Hwan Baek, MD, PhD, at the Asan Medical Center in Seoul, South Korea.

Dr. Sinclair also has developed a continuous laryngeal reflex monitoring system that is used during RFA to prevent vocal cord damage and hoarseness, which are potential risks during both RFA and standard surgery. In the system, nerve fibers within the neck are continuously stimulated to check their function, allowing surgeons to quickly take preventive measures against injury. This innovative method does not require a neck incision and is the only monitoring technique available for noninvasive procedures such as RFA.

Mount Sinai is one of the few health systems in the region to offer ethanol ablation. In that procedure, an alcohol solution is injected into thyroid nodules, killing cells and causing the masses to slowly shrink. The procedure leaves only a small scar and is performed in the office with local anesthesia. Dr. Sinclair says ethanol ablation may be more effective than RFA for fluid-filled thyroid cysts, and RFA is a better noninvasive choice for large, solid nodules. A combination of both procedures can be used for cystic/solid lesions. Ethanol ablation is performed at the Mount Sinai Thyroid Center at Union Square by its Director, Maria Brito, MD, Assistant Professor of Medicine (Endocrinology, Diabetes and Bone Disease), Icahn School of Medicine; and Michael Via, MD, Associate Professor of Medicine (Endocrinology, Diabetes and Bone Disease), Icahn School of Medicine; and by Dr. Sinclair at Mount Sinai West.

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“The procedures will not necessarily eliminate the nodule completely, and patients will still need to have ultrasound follow-ups to monitor the nodule,” Dr. Brito says. “But in appropriate cases, they are a terrific option. They make it very easy for the patient.”
Luminaries in addiction research, policy, and clinical care, led by keynote speaker Nora Volkow, MD, Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), participated in an all-day conference in the fall hosted by the Addiction Institute of Mount Sinai (AIMS) at the New York Academy of Medicine.

“Today is about solutions,” said AIMS Director Yasmin Hurd, PhD, Ward-Coleman Chair of Translational Neuroscience, as she welcomed guests to the “Confronting Addiction: Science, Policy, and Care” conference. “Our objective is to start a dialogue among scientists, policymakers, and clinicians so we can create more opportunities to collaborate on developing more effective treatment strategies, support structures, and policy infrastructure for people and families struggling with addiction.” Dr. Hurd, a world-renowned researcher in the neurobiology of addiction disorders, is also Professor of Psychiatry, Neuroscience, and Pharmacological Sciences at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. Her remarks were followed by introductions from 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, and Eric J. Nestler, MD, PhD, Nash Family Professor of Neuroscience, Dean for Academic and Scientific Affairs, and Director of The Friedman Brain Institute at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai.

In her speech, “The Role of Science in Substance Abuse Policy and Care,” Dr. Volkow challenged the audience: “When I first came to Washington, D.C., as Director of NIDA, one of the most frustrating things was my naïve perception that policy would be guided by science—and it’s not.” She asked: “So what do we need to do to make sure it’s not ignored? What can we, as scientists, do to increase the likelihood that our evidence-based findings are implemented into policy?”

The event also included discussions on four key topics: Taking Addiction Policy into the 21st Century; Early Predictors of Addiction; Objective Assessment of Addiction Symptoms and Treatment Outcomes; and New Frontiers in Addiction Treatment.

Evan L. Flatow, MD, President of Mount Sinai West and Bernard J. Lasker Professor of Orthopedics, said in the video, “Peter understood what was in the DNA of Mount Sinai. He was deeply committed to our mission. The history books will say that Peter saved our institution.”

Indeed, a short time after assuming Mount Sinai’s Chairmanship in 2002, Mr. May tapped Dr. Davis to serve as Dean and then as Chief Executive Officer. Within three years, Mount Sinai was operating profitably. Reflecting upon their combined leadership, Dr. Davis said, “We had a shared vision and shared common values. We believed in what this institution had stood for during its 150-year history.”

Under Mr. May’s tenure as Chairman, Mount Sinai raised $5 billion. In 2015, he presided over the formation of the Mount Sinai Health System, when The Mount Sinai Medical Center combined with Continuum Health Partners to become one of New York City’s largest health systems. “To take us from the brink of bankruptcy to the system we are today, with eight hospitals and over 400 ambulatory centers, to 42,000 employees—who would have thought it?” said Dr. Davis. “And it happened under Peter’s direction, guidance, and leadership.”

Dennis S. Charney, MD, Anne and Joel Ehrenkranz Dean, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, and President for Academic Affairs, Mount Sinai Health System, said that Mr. May’s support was vital in helping the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai achieve its world-class status. “When I came to him and said, ‘this is what we need to do to make our medical school great’ and to ensure that we recruited the best and brightest students and faculty who were innovative and whose goal was to improve the lives of our patients, Peter provided the necessary resources and trusted me in working to accomplish that.”

Mr. May said that Mount Sinai will always occupy a very special place for him, his wife, Leni, their two children, and grandchildren. “I am not giving up my care, my love, my interest, and my years of dedication to Mount Sinai,” he said. “It will be part of my life as long as I live.”
Each morning, senior leaders throughout the Mount Sinai Health System report in on operational and safety matters in a conference call known as the “Daily Huddle.” A bright spot of the calls is a segment in which a leader shares the story of a faculty or staff member who has gone above and beyond in demonstrating the values of Mount Sinai: safety, creativity, empathy, agility, and teamwork.

More than 120 of these standout staff members were honored in person on Thursday, November 7, in an event hosted by Mount Sinai Health System leaders Vicki LoPachin, MD, Chief Medical Officer and Senior Vice President; and Margaret Pastuszko, Executive Vice President, Chief Operating Officer, and Chief Strategy Officer. The celebration at the Corporate Services Center was sponsored by Sinai Spotlight, a Health System employee recognition and appreciation program led by the Division of Talent Development & Learning. The honorees networked with Health System leaders, enjoyed healthy snacks, and viewed stories about their excellent service that were posted on an Appreciation Wall.

In a presentation, Sinai Spotlight committee members from each site shared summaries of the stories and called staff members to the front of the room for applause and cheers.

“During the Daily Huddle, when we hear stories of your going out of your way for your patients and co-workers, we always take a moment to smile and remember why we are here,” Ms. Pastuszko said. “You are the fabric of this institution, and we are so grateful to all of you.”
Free Smoking-Cessation Program

The Mount Sinai Health System offers free, personalized smoking-cessation coaching and treatment for faculty, students, and staff. Participants will have access to services that include a personal care plan with tools and the support of a medical team that will monitor one’s health and suggest appropriate smoking-cessation medications. Learn more at https://www.mountsinai.org/about/ms-fit or email wellness@mountsinai.org.

New Hours for Mount Sinai Express Care

Mount Sinai Express Care at 1440 Madison Avenue has launched weekend hours and is open Saturdays and Sundays, 9 am – 4:30 pm. Weekday hours are 9 am – 8:30 pm. No appointment is needed. Walk in seven days a week to get expert care for minor illnesses and injuries. Learn more at www.mountsinai.org/expresscare.