



## MD degree gives grads backstage pass to life



Looking forward to life after medical school are (from left) Nancy Ho, Ali Jalali, Sunil Kapur, Lauren Kerr, Boram Kim, and Austin Kirschner.

On a warm spring day, excitement ran high as 167 medical students received their diplomas at Northwestern's graduation convocation on May 14 at Chicago's Navy Pier Grand Ballroom. This always momentous ceremony held extra special importance as it marked the school's sesquicentennial year.

Proud parents, friends, and relatives gathered to snap photos, give pats on the back, and send out a few enthusiastic shouts as the students filed into the ballroom.

"We are absolutely thrilled to see this day come," said Amy Finn, mother of new graduate Ian Finn of Boston, who was one of 12 students graduating with dual MD/PhD degrees. "We are grateful to the Feinberg School of Medicine for providing our son the opportunity for a bright future."

Dean Larry Jameson and Northwestern University President Henry Bienen conferred the degrees and applauded the 150th graduating class on their accomplishments. "Today you join the world's most respected and distinguished profession," said Dean Jameson. "You will find that your patients now refer to you as doctor, even though some of them could be your grandparents."

They trust you with their most precious possession: their health. Northwestern has prepared you well for this next chapter."

Class president Josephine Ni presented faculty member James J. Paparello, MD, assistant professor of medicine in the Division of Nephrology, with the 2009 George H. Joost Award for teaching excellence. She noted his unintimidating nature and ability to explain complex concepts in simple terms.

Keynote speaker and proud alumnus James R. Webster Jr., MD '56, GME '64, told graduates that they have the best jobs in town with a degree that offers them "a backstage pass to life with a priceless opportunity to interact with human beings at the most difficult and delicate times of their lives, including literally life and death." This professor of medicine and emeritus director of the medical school's Buehler Center on Aging, Health, and Society, encouraged them to be agents of change whether it be to help solve the problems of the national health care system or affect the "behavioral choices that account for how long and how well people live."

Student Nafis Ahmed electrified the audience with his senior class message.

A geriatric medicine specialist, Dr. Webster went on to explain that diet, exercise, and lifestyle choices play a large role in health outcomes as genetic makeup. He called on the graduates to use their leadership skills and the new "bully pulpit implicit in your MD degree" to influence the masses—not just individual patients—to live healthy lives. "Never underestimate your potential impact and your ability to initiate and lead change," he said.

Dr. Webster encouraged the students to appreciate those who have helped them achieve their goal of becoming physicians and to approach the future with the same altruism and sense of inquiry that attracted them to medicine. Finally, describing the graduates as the "keepers of the flame," he advised them to enjoy their new profession wherever it leads them, noting that they will receive much more than they will give in terms of service. He remarked, "The way to assure that this happens is simply for you to give."

Delivering a memorable senior class message was Nafis Ahmed, MD '09, of Springfield, Virginia. He addressed the group with an electric guitar strapped over his chest to make the point that although he may look like a musician, he's never played the guitar in his life or on TV, for that matter.

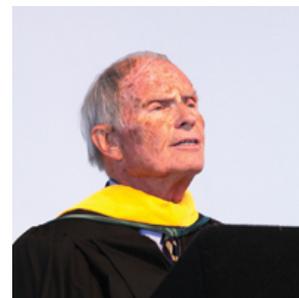
"... And that's kind of how I feel about starting intern year," he told the chuckling audience. "Sure we've studied the chords, we've practiced the lyrics, we've even rehearsed with the equipment dozens of times but in a few short weeks from now, it's going to feel like we're performing for the very first time." He encouraged the group to take heart, though, knowing that they follow in the footsteps of thousands of graduates before them, who also feared their first day but went on to greatness.

Citing the careers of Sandra F. Olson, MD '63, GME '69, the first female chief of staff at Northwestern Memorial Hospital, and Quentin D. Young, MD '48, personal physician to the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and now leading the cause for universal health care reform, the "newly minted" Dr. Ahmed encouraged his classmates to follow their predecessors.

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Saranya Srinivasan can't help but laugh during student speaker Nafis Ahmed's electric guitar-toting presentation.



Keynote speaker and Class of 1956 graduate Dr. James Webster urges the future physicians to use their medical education to its full advantage in helping people.



It is all smiles for Kristin Berona and Jeffrey Backes.



Finally, Dr. Ahmed asked his classmates to stand, turn, and applaud their "supporting crew" of family, friends, and teachers for making them the "rock stars of the Class of 2009."

After leaving the ballroom, the new Northwestern graduates, as now is tradition, gathered together with Dean Jameson to raise a champagne toast to the end of their medical school education and the beginning of their bright futures.

*Janet DeRaleau*



College mentor Dr. Irwin Benuck hoods new graduate Kara Gleason.

## Luncheon honors graduating seniors

The annual graduation luncheon often serves as the dress rehearsal for the big event: commencement. Sponsored by the Northwestern University Medical Alumni Association, this year's luncheon gave seniors the opportunity to enjoy the elegant surroundings of the Ritz-Carlton hotel and give kudos to five classmates who were recognized at the May 13 event. Jonah **Fleisher** of Oak Park, Illinois, and Justin Reif of Colorado Springs, Colorado, received the Kenneth M. Viste Jr., MD '66, Student Service Recognition Award. The Frederick Stenn Award went to Melissa Marinelli of Glenview, Illinois, and the Neil Stone Award, to Catherine Koss of Alexandria, Virginia. Lakshmi Tummala of Douglasville, Georgia, was honored with the Jonathan Philip Reder Award. These happy medical school seniors mugging for the camera are (from left) Michelle Lin, Benjamin Gayed, Cristina Garcia, Krissy Lee, Josh Evans, Smita Joshi, Zachary Domont, Ben Gray, Neil Dion, Jeffrey Backes, Katharine Brock, and Kristin Berona.



## Surgical relief program helps the underserved

Student Michael Granieri feels his global aid experiences have enriched his medical education by connecting him with patients living in resource-poor countries.

When the Department of Urology launched an international surgical relief program in 2001, it began providing underserved communities with much-needed quality treatment of genitourinary disease delivered by highly skilled faculty members and residents. This year, for the first time, the program gave a medical student a head start on his surgical rotation.

Michael Granieri of Burr Ridge, Illinois, joined program coordinator Christopher M. Gonzalez, MD, GME '00, MBA '06, and senior urology residents Neema Navai and Oni Okotie on a surgical relief trip to the tiny village of San Blas, Mexico, in February. Over a weekend, the team attended to 50 patients and performed six urological surgeries.

Granieri functioned as a scrub tech for the group and saw diseases and abnormalities not often seen in this country.

"He was a big help to us down there," says Dr. Gonzalez, about the team's first student. "It was an outstanding experience for him to see the intensity of being faced with a problem, deciding what to do, and then following up."

Granieri expanded upon his interests in both global health and surgery. He found the latter to be particularly satisfying. Says Granieri, who just completed his second year of medical school, "Repairing major deformities and dramatically improving someone's quality of life in a matter of hours was very rewarding."

For Dr. Okotie, the experience helped put his surgical training into a different perspective from the one he normally encounters as a physician. "It gave me a better understanding of how the underserved are cared for in other areas of the world. Our trip brought home to me that people really need our help in places where access to quality care is insufficient." During the trip, the

Northwestern team also shared sleeping quarters with their patients, some who had traveled great distances to the San Blas clinic to receive care.

A decade of National Guard service whetted Dr. Gonzalez's desire to help the less fortunate. In addition to Mexico, his surgical relief trips have included visits to Honduras, China, and Ecuador.



## We're all on the same team

I believe in teamwork and collaboration at every turn. It's that simple. When I'm in the operating room, I depend on a team to complete the task of performing a transplant. But prior to the transplant, another team helped the patient navigate through the complexities of preparing for the transplant process. Following the surgery and for years to come, yet another team will work collaboratively to optimize the long-term effectiveness of the transplant. These teams do not work in silos. Instead, the teams themselves collaborate with each other to ensure continuity of purpose. This provides the pride of enterprise and sense of shared destiny needed to succeed.

I view my role as a medical leader much like that of the coach or manager of a sports team. My job is to facilitate the recruitment of the best and brightest, and to update the playbook based on the strengths of the players while identifying and remedying the weaknesses. I am responsible for team discipline and morale. I mediate disputes and misunderstandings and provide encouragement when needed. The surgeon sets the tone in the operating room. The coach/manager sets the spirit of the team. Camaraderie is essential, and therefore being a member of the team, being a buddy to the players, is also essential. However, we all report to a higher order. In the case of a sports team, that's usually the league, which has its own set of rules and regulations. But the team's performance has to be aligned with the expectations of the owners, the fans, and the city. In the case of academic medicine, it's a department or rather, many departments. It's a hospital, a school, a university.



As the director of the newly formed comprehensive transplant center, I work with many teams, with many captains and many leagues. Yet they all coalesce into one academic institution—an academic center. This is where it all comes together. While the perspective of a surgeon, a division chief, a center director, or dean of clinical affairs may differ slightly, it really boils down to a simple concept: align interdependent efforts and help create the best team, the best league, the best academic medical center. The end game, you ask? Provide the best care possible to our patients by assembling the most talented and most connected teams. It's that simple.

Michael M. Abecassis, MD, MBA

*James Roscoe Miller Distinguished Professor of Medicine  
Professor of Surgery and Microbiology—Immunology  
Chief, Division of Organ Transplantation  
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## Match Day emotions run high for students



Anxiety. Tears. Joy. Hugs. Kisses. High fives. Match Day 2009 involved all that and more for the 162 students who gathered at a Chicago pizza restaurant on March 19 to find out their future assignments as residents. For the first time, faculty mentors presented assignment envelopes to their students. Those same mentors hooded them at medical school graduation ceremonies in May.

At the event a delighted Melissa A. Marinelli of Glenview, Illinois, not only got her desired match in emergency medicine at Northwestern McGaw but also received a congratulatory fleece jacket emblazoned with the words "Northwestern Emergency Medicine." Residency program director Jamie Collings, MD, assistant professor of emergency medicine, attended the event to hand-deliver the welcome gift. Emergency medicine ranked second in popularity, following internal medicine, among this year's Northwestern students.

"I have no doubt that Melissa will be a future leader in the specialty of emergency medicine, and we are honored to have the opportunity to help prepare her for that future," said Dr. Collings. "We are especially thrilled when we are able to keep such superb Northwestern students in our residency program."

It seems fitting that Marinelli should carry on her family's Northwestern connection. Born at Prentice Women's Hospital, this 2009 medical school graduate is the daughter of alumnus Anthony M. Marinelli, MD '73, an internist who specializes in critical care medicine and pulmonary disease and practices in the Chicago area.

Nontraditional student Corpia C. Smith of Chicago won't be going far either for her residency training. Mother to Ronnie, 10, and Ashley, 16, Smith celebrated her match—at Northwestern McGaw in internal medicine—with her family and friends. "I'm really proud of my mom," said Ronnie. Nontraditional students are generally defined as those who have taken two or more years off between undergraduate studies and matriculation to medical school. Currently, about 15 percent of enrolled Feinberg medical students fit this description.

While Marinelli and Smith are staying close to home, Karuna Dewan of Grand Rapids, Michigan, started her residency in otolaryngology at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston this summer. Her proud father, Brij, who flew to Chicago to join the celebration, is undeterred by the distance. "I've already checked out direct flights from Grand Rapids to Houston," he said.

Otolaryngology, dermatology, and neurological and orthopaedic surgery were the most competitive specialties for medical school seniors, according to the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP). The program sponsors Match Day throughout the United States. This year's number of match applications to the NRMP was the largest to date with more than 15,000 U.S. medical school students—400 more than in 2008.

All 196 positions offered by the Northwestern McGaw training program match filled this year. "Every seat on the plane taken," noted Raymond H. Curry, MD, GME '85, executive associate dean for education and professor of medicine and medical education. The Department of Medicine notes that 20 percent of its matches were with students historically underrepresented in medicine.

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