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The 2013 graduates of the Louis V. Gerstner, Jr. Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences



Commencement speaker Siddhartha Mukherjee



Nicholas Gauthier delivers remarks on behalf of his fellow Louis V. Gerstner, Jr. Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences graduates



The Platform Party -- (From left) Memorial Sloan Kettering President Craig Thompson, keynote speaker Siddhartha Mukherjee, Gerstner Sloan Kettering Graduate School Provost Thomas Kelly, Gerstner Sloan Kettering Graduate School Dean Kenneth Mariani, Memorial Sloan Kettering President Emeritus Paul Marks, Chair of the Board of Managers of the Sloan Kettering Institute Marie-Josée Kravis, and Memorial Hospital Physician-in-Chief José Baselga



Craig Thompson presents the Katharine Berkan Judd Award Lectureship to cell biologist Titia de Lange of The Rockefeller University



Memorial Sloan Kettering President Emeritus Paul Marks



Swarnali Acharya receives a postdoctoral research award from Thomas Kelly



Cancer biologist Johanna Joyce (center) with Gerstner Sloan Kettering graduate Karen Hunter (right) and Weill Cornell PhD recipient Stephanie Pyonteck



Memorial Sloan Kettering cell biologist Malcolm Moore receives the C. Chester Stock Award Lectureship



(Right) Kenneth Mariani presents the Frank Lappin Horsfall, Jr. Fellowship to Manu Setty

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“Memorial Sloan Kettering is an extraordinary institution, and our biggest asset is the people who choose to work and to train here,” said Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center President and CEO [Craig B. Thompson](#), welcoming graduates and guests to the 34th annual Academic Convocation and the second Commencement ceremony for students of the [Louis V. Gerstner, Jr. Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences](#) on May 10. “This day really belongs to them — to the award winners and trainees — as we recognize and reward their excellence and we honor the young men and women who will be the scientific and medical leaders of tomorrow.”

Academic Convocation honors students whose doctoral dissertation work was conducted in Memorial Sloan Kettering laboratories through a partnership between [Weill Cornell Medical College](#) and the [Sloan Kettering Institute](#). Younger Memorial Sloan Kettering physicians, scientists, and postdoctoral research fellows, as well as established clinicians and investigators from Memorial Sloan Kettering and beyond, are also recognized. In addition, students of the Louis V. Gerstner, Jr. Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences receive their PhD degrees during a Commencement ceremony. This year, six students — representing the first, second, and third classes — received degrees, bringing the total number of graduates of the school to ten.

“Make the whole world better”: Convocation awards

Members of the Memorial Sloan Kettering community are presented each year at Convocation with awards that recognize outstanding research publications by graduate students, others that honor Memorial Sloan Kettering physicians and scientists under the age of 40 who have demonstrated special accomplishments in clinical and laboratory investigations, and still others that acknowledge the work of Sloan Kettering Institute postdoctoral fellows.

Memorial Sloan Kettering also honors veteran physicians and scientists. The Willet F. Whitmore Award for Clinical Excellence is presented each year to a clinician whose long service, talent, and dedication reflect the standards set by Dr. Whitmore during his more than 46 years at Memorial Sloan

Kettering. This year, the award went to [Larry Norton](#), Deputy Physician-in-Chief for [Breast Cancer](#) Programs, Medical Director of the [Evelyn H. Lauder Breast Center](#), and the first incumbent of the Norna S. Sarofim Chair in Clinical Oncology. [Memorial Hospital](#) Physician-in-Chief José Baselga — who trained under Dr. Norton — presented the award, saying, “Larry is not only the ultimate clinician but an amazing teacher... . Our discussions were rich and productive and he made sure we learned the principles of taking care of patients with breast cancer.” He quoted another colleague who said of Dr. Norton, “Larry’s talent is immense ... and his compassion is expressed not only in the bonds he forms with his patients and their families, but also in his desire to make the whole world better using any and all means he can.”

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“Wise counsel, insight, and friendship”: Honorary degree conferred

An honorary Doctor of Science degree was conferred on Memorial Sloan Kettering President Emeritus Paul A. Marks by the Louis V. Gerstner, Jr. Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences. “Over his many years at Memorial Sloan Kettering, we have been blessed with Paul’s wise counsel, insight, and friendship,” said Dr. Thompson in his presentation of the degree. “His work and his leadership established the highest standards of research and patient care at MSKCC, and his commitment to mentoring generations of clinicians and scientists is well known.”

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“Take the reins and lead”: Commencement student speaker

Nicholas Gauthier spoke on behalf of his fellow Gerstner Sloan Kettering School graduates, observing that the school’s unique approach — the integration of basic science, clinical research, and patient care — “gives us a strong lead in translating massive amounts of biological data into clinically relevant therapies.” He exhorted his fellow students to “take advantage of this amazing education, take the reins, and lead in the fight against cancer.”

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“Tenderness and tension”: A Pulitzer Prize–winning author addresses the graduates

Physician-scientist Siddhartha Mukherjee, author of *The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer*, which won the 2011 Pulitzer Prize for General Nonfiction, spoke to graduates of the “tenderness and tension” inherent in scientific discovery.



Remarks of Graduate Nicholas Gauthier

Dr. Gauthier, a member of the second class of the Louis V. Gerstner, Jr. Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, reflects on how the school prepared him and his fellow graduates for a life in science.

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"Newspapers may bring us news of a scientific-industrial complex that is increasingly depersonalized ... where terabytes of data are churned through supercomputers to generate gigabytes of information," he said. "But ask a real scientist and you get a profoundly different image of how real science happens."

"Science," Dr. Mukherjee asserted, "is among the most profoundly human of our activities. Far from being subsumed by the dehumanizing effects of technology, science in fact remains our last stand against it." Invoking "the indelible image of Gregor Mendel, a monk in wire-rimmed glasses, tending his plants, stooping with paintbrush and forceps, to transfer the orange dust of pollen from one flower to the next," he described a quality he called the "tenderness" of the scientific enterprise.

"It's not a word typically used to describe science or scientists," Dr. Mukherjee acknowledged. "It describes a certain intimacy between human beings and nature, a nourishment that must happen before investigation can begin."

Dr. Mukherjee framed his talk by asking how Mendel, working in the mid-1800s in the garden of his monastery, "stumbled upon what is arguably the most seminal discovery of modern biology: that hereditary information is transmitted from one generation to the next.

"His science began with tending," noted Dr. Mukherjee. "The laborious cross-fertilization of seedlings ... the markings of wrinkles on seeds [which] led him to findings that could not be explained by the traditional understanding of biology or inheritance. Tending generated tension until the old fulcrum of biology was snapped in two."

“Tenderness and tension,” said Dr. Mukherjee, “the two qualities that I think define science. Tenderness has to do with the day-to-day life of a scientist... . When I witness science in action, I see this tenderness in abundance. On Monday morning, the graduate students and postdoctoral fellows in my laboratory rush in to see how their cells have grown over the weekend. The best of these researchers have a gardener’s instinct: Some cultures need nourishment; some need to be left alone to inhabit the corners of incubators; and yet others need to be coaxed with growth factors to flourish.”

And then, explained Dr. Mukherjee, “out of those years of tending comes tension — that spectacular crystallizing moment when all the pieces of a puzzle come together on the verge of making complete sense.”

At the conclusion of his address, Dr. Mukherjee received the Memorial Sloan Kettering Medal for Outstanding Contributions to Biomedical Research, which is awarded each year to the keynote speaker.

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