

Miller School Alumni and Supporters Organize White Coats and Stethoscopes for New Students

A first-year student originally from Antigua, Joshua Warner was eagerly awaiting the ceremony that would signal the start of his medical career. Warner and his classmates in the University of Miami's Leonard M. Miller School of Medicine Class of 2024 were about to receive white coats, a symbol synonymous with brilliant and compassionate physicians.



Joshua Warner, M.D. candidate, Class of 2024, and Dean Henri R. Ford.

“I think wearing my first white coat is going to feel quite surreal,” said Warner, who attended a summer program at the Miller School in 2018.

Fittingly, the white coats were provided primarily by Miller School alumni who know first-hand the importance of support during those critical early days of medical school. Their generosity, along with the support of faculty and other donors, played a significant role in this year’s John G. Clarkson Freshman White Coat and Pinning Ceremony, which was held at Hard Rock Stadium’s Fountain Plaza. The open-air screening space was repurposed to safely orchestrate the socially distanced event, which is one of the most important rites of passage for first-year students, as they took the Hippocratic Oath wearing their new white coats.

“It’s the beginning of this new journey that we’re all embarking on and it instills the importance, and all the values, we want to carry into our future medical career,” said

Kristen Mascarenhas, an M.D./M.P.H. candidate in the Class of 2024. “I think it's just the perfect setting to be able to start this new journey and I appreciate the time and support that went into it.”

While in-person attendance was limited to the Class of 2024 members, key Miller School leadership, faculty, and alumni due to COVID-19 restrictions, more than 1,000 participants joined the live stream of the celebratory event. Alumni made much of the event possible, including spearheading a significant effort to raise more than \$50,000 to ensure that all 205 incoming students received white coats and stethoscopes.



Kristen Mascarenhas, M.D./M.P.H. candidate, Class of 2024.

“Since 1956, the Medical Alumni Association has been committed to enhancing mutually beneficial and lasting relationships between alumni, the school, students, and faculty,” said Hilit

F. Mechaber, M.D. '95, associate dean for student services. "You are now a part of this relationship." The Class of 2024 also received the Miller School pin, attached to the lapel of the white coat, as they took the symbolic steps to dedicate themselves to the next phase of their medical academic journey.

Alessia Lavin, M.D. candidate in the Class of 2021, and executive director of the academic societies, explained the history and significance of the Miller School pin, a long-standing tradition founded by two Miller School alumni when they were students, Lakshmi Reddy, M.D., and Cristina Pravia, M.D., both from the Class of 2000.

The pin, designed by a third alumnus, Acey Albert, M.D. '01, leverages several visual motifs to align with the Miller School's mission, from the DNA molecule, a symbol of past and ongoing scientific and clinical research, and outstretched rays, representing the healing hands extended to those in need. "The alumni wanted to find a way to welcome incoming students, while also acknowledging the honor of becoming a physician," noted Lavin.

The ceremony opened with the Class of 2024 walking across the lawn toward their chairs, arranged to allow for social distancing, their new white coats folded over their arms.

"We believe that the donning of the white coat is a reminder of the tremendous responsibility you will now start to bear on your shoulders as physicians-in-training at the Miller School of Medicine," said Latha Chandran, M.D., M.P.H., executive dean and founding chair of the Department of Medical Education, "From now on you represent the University. You

represent the medical school. You represent the profession. Always act in a way that makes all of us proud of you.”



Sanjana Satish, M.D./M.P.H. candidate, Class of 2024, and UM President Julio Frenk.

Medical alumni had yet another surprise for the aspiring physicians. Miller-branded stethoscopes were hidden in bags under each student’s chair along with words of encouragement submitted by alumni who donated to the white coat and stethoscope funds.

“Bravo, and welcome to this sacred calling! Welcome to our family of ‘Cane doctors,” wrote Torre HalScott, M.D. ’09, in his note of encouragement, “I hope this white coat reminds you of all you’ve accomplished to be able to put it on and all the good you’ll do when you wear it.”

Speakers at the event reinforced the significance of the white

coat and pinning ceremony for the Class of 2024. “Today is the beginning of an incredible journey into fulfilling your promise and potential as the physicians of tomorrow,” said Henri R. Ford, M.D., M.H.A., dean and chief academic officer of the Miller School of Medicine. “Your profession has always carried a great privilege and profound duty to the health of individuals and, by extension, the betterment of humankind.”

The ceremony was especially meaningful for faculty and alumni who were able to place white coats on their sons and daughters. Students were also grateful to safely experience such a memorable milestone during a pandemic. “This ceremony really represents the culmination of a lot of hard work to get here,” said Sanjana Satish, a M.D./M.P.H. candidate in the Class of 2024. “It’s definitely better than being at home putting on my white coat in front of a computer screen. I really appreciate our alumni and supporters for giving us this moment.”