



## DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARDS

Dennis S. Charney '77g



**To Dennis S. Charney for his extraordinary career in psychiatric medicine as well as his research and breakthrough discovery for the treatment of depression.**

Having lived in urban areas most of his life, the bucolic farmland of Hershey, Pa., was a welcomed change of scenery for Dennis Charney, just off to medical school with his bride in 1973. But, it wasn't only the cows and cornfields that attracted him to Penn State Hershey College of Medicine, it was the "humanistic approach to education," he said.

"It was known for providing a very personalized education. It had a humanities department within the medical school, which was unique at that time, and it was known to have a great young faculty that really cared about its students," Charney said.

"What happened to me there had a major effect on my career. As a first-year medical student, I developed a close relationship with the chairman of the department of psychiatry—Anthony Kales—who took me under his wing. Dr. Kales was a world renowned researcher on the mechanisms of sleep and I did research alongside him.

That attracted me to go into psychiatry and psychiatry research, which wasn't my original plan. When I went into medical school, I was thinking of family medicine and going into the Peace Corps. Instead, I became a neuroscientist and psychiatry researcher. I grew passionate about researching the brain and how it relates to mental illness. That developed into the focus of my career—and it all started with Dr. Kales," Charney explained.

Today, Charney is the Anne and Joel Ehrenkranz Dean of the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai and the president for academic affairs for Mount Sinai Health System. Under his leadership, Mount Sinai has become one of the top medical schools in the country as measured by education, research, and clinical care. As the only medical school affiliated with Mount Sinai Health System, which includes seven hospitals, the Icahn School of Medicine has one of the largest training and research footprints in the country.

Prior to his tenure at Mount Sinai, Charney led the Mood and Anxiety Research Program at the National Institute of Mental Health. Before that, he was on the faculty in the department of psychiatry at Yale Medical School, where he also completed his residency in psychiatry.

Throughout his demanding career, Charney has maintained an active role in psychiatric research. His years of concentration: trying to uncover the causes of serious forms of depression and anxiety disorders as well as developing new treatments.

As a result of his scientific research, Charney has discovered, along with Yale colleague John Krystal, that the anesthetic drug, Ketamine, can also be used for treating depression. Ketamine's use as a rapidly-acting anti-depressant has been hailed by others in the psychiatry field to be one of the major breakthroughs in the last 50 years in the treatment of depression. "It has a unique mechanism of action that is very different than the available drugs for depression," said Charney. It's currently being developed and tested for approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Charney also researches human resiliency to try to "understand the psychological factors and the biological/genetic factors that promote one's ability to deal with stress in a resilient way." He's studied hundreds of resilient people; learning from them what it takes to overcome trauma. He's identified 10 key factors necessary for building the strength to weather stress

and trauma which he reveals in his book, *Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges*.

Charney is a prolific writer with more than 700 publications under his name. He has received numerous awards and honors for his professional achievements, including the Penn State Alumni Fellow Award in 2002.

Charney lives in Chappaqua, N.Y., with his high school sweetheart, Andrea, to whom he's been married 43 years. A lifelong competitive athlete and world traveler, Charney loves to take adventure trips with his children, Allison, Meredith, Lauren, Alex, and Danielle. The Charneys have two grandchildren, Alexandra and Caleb.

