March 13, 2020

Dear Einstein Community:

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented event that poses an enormous challenge to Einstein, the nation, and the world. In addition to the medical concerns, the virus has disrupted our lives and created widespread anxiety within our own community. In the midst of this harsh reality, I am extremely proud of the positive and constructive behavior of so many in the Einstein community and applaud their dedication and tolerance.

The most important thing—by far—is ensuring everyone’s health and safety. It’s important to stress, therefore, that we’re not aware of anyone who lives or works on campus who has contracted the coronavirus. Moreover, if someone is infected, the likelihood is that they will only suffer mild or moderate symptoms of the disease. These are positive considerations.

However, it is essential that we prepare for any scenario. Thus, as part of our planning efforts, the leadership of Einstein and Montefiore, including experts in infectious diseases and public health, are conferring daily. As a consequence, we have implemented significant changes in the operations of our education and research programs and facilities management. Our goal is to interrupt the cycle of transmission so as not to overwhelm the health system with infected individuals in need of care.

That’s why we’ve chosen a very specific strategy to execute—one designed to mitigate, to the extent possible, the spread of the disease. These are the specific steps that we have already taken:

- Banning gatherings of large groups of people (no more than 10 to 20);
- Conducting all class-based instruction virtually;
- Stopping or restricting clinical experiences and rotations for medical students;
- Canceling or severely modifying campus events;
- Encouraging social distancing;
- Modifying how food service is delivered (now packaged);
- Making sure there is enhanced cleaning of all buildings;
- Severely limiting foreign and domestic travel;
- Postponing or canceling events that would bring outsiders to campus;
- Stressing such things as frequent hand washing and social distancing, and other steps to prevent the spread of the disease; and
- Working on increasing ways for people to work remotely.
This last step is important because it might help ease some people’s concerns about working on campus, while also reducing, when possible, the number of individuals who regularly interact with each other—which could help mitigate the spread of disease.

As the situation evolves, additional modifications of Einstein’s operations may be required, and will be guided by local and regional events as well as guidelines from the NYC Department of Health and CDC. We will also continue advocating for broader, more immediate testing.

Of course, we can’t be certain of how the pandemic will unfold in the days and months ahead. That’s why I’ve instructed my senior leadership team to put together a contingency plan should we have to dramatically alter operations. Our goal is to be prepared for these situations and hope that they never happen.

I’ve also asked our communications team to provide more frequent updates of what we’re doing on campus. The first of these will come later today from Einstein’s executive leadership team, which is charged with continuously updating our guidelines and policies regarding COVID-19. We are also working on developing a template that will provide a quick overview of the status of this disease in our region.

Paramount among the things we can and should do now is proper personal/hand hygiene, with frequent hand washing, avoiding touching your face, and social distancing. Our facilities personnel have been extraordinary and are our first line of defense against transmission of the virus.

I realize that words alone will not allay everyone’s worries and concerns. But I want you to know that we have a strategy and plan in place to address this situation. Whatever we do, I want everyone to know—as a member of the Einstein community, as a physician, and as dean of our medical school—that I recognize that the health and safety of our students, staff, and faculty are paramount.

We recognize our role as a steward of the public health as part of our mission to improve human health, and we will succeed in this mission and manage through this pandemic. It’s also completely in line with the humanistic values of the College of Medicine, which have been in effect since our founding and is one of the reasons so many people work at Einstein.

We can all be reassured that we are in this together and we will overcome it together.

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