September 6, 2017

CELEBRATING EINSTEIN-MONTEFIORE’S SECOND ANNIVERSARY

Dear Einstein Community:

My letter of September 8, 2016 celebrated the first anniversary of Einstein’s becoming a part of Montefiore Medicine, and described the many steps we had successfully taken to integrate Einstein within the Montefiore Academic Health System. The inaugural Einstein-Montefiore Presidential Lecture given by John Condeelis and Joseph Sparano on June 21, 2017 provided tangible evidence of that successful integration. As we now begin another academic year, I would like to review selected accomplishments and significant changes of the past year, as we mark the second anniversary of Einstein’s transition. Underpinning all of our accomplishments is the shared strong commitment of Einstein and Montefiore to diversity, inclusiveness, and social justice. Now more than ever, we must reaffirm that commitment.

Progress toward Independent Degree-granting

As I informed the Einstein community in March 2017, the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) awarded Einstein full, eight-year accreditation for its M.D. educational program. This is a major accomplishment and a testimonial to Einstein’s excellence in medical education. LCME accreditation is one critical step toward achieving independent degree-granting status (for M.D., Ph.D., and Masters degrees)—a key goal in Einstein and Montefiore becoming a fully-integrated Academic Health System. To achieve this goal, we must also receive “regional accreditation” through the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), and approval from the New York State Education Department (NYSED). We have made excellent progress toward our goal with submission of our Accreditation Readiness Report to the MSCHE on June 16 of this year. We have received positive feedback from them, as well as from NYSED. The next step in this process will be a site visit to Einstein by MSCHE staff.

Changes in our Medical and Graduate Student Education Programs

With the retirement of Marti Grayson in June of this year, I appointed Josh Nosanchuk as our new Senior Associate Dean for Medical Education. Pablo Joo was also promoted to Associate Dean within the Office of Medical Education. Steve Baum became Senior Advisor in the Office of Student Affairs (OSA), and I appointed Allison Ludwig Associate Dean for Student Affairs, assuming leadership responsibility for OSA.
Substantial work was done by the Curriculum Design Executive Committee toward revamping our medical education curriculum. Full implementation of a new curriculum is not envisioned until the 2019-2020 academic year, but a number of curriculum enhancements and pilot educational projects are planned starting this academic year.

At the start of Orientation Week on August 14, we welcomed the new medical school class of 2021. A highlight of the week was the “On Becoming a Physician” ceremony, with an inspirational keynote talk given by new Psychiatry Chair (see below), Jonathan Alpert.

In August, we also welcomed a new class of students to our graduate program. I’m happy to report that through the efforts of Associate Dean for Graduate Programs in Biomedical Sciences, Victoria Freedman, and the Graduate Program Faculty committee, there is a significant increase in the number of graduate students matriculating at Einstein in 2017-18, as we regain “critical mass” for this program, vital to both our educational and research missions.

**New Academic Leadership and New Research Recruits**

Two of the clinical department chair searches I referenced in last year’s anniversary letter have been successfully completed. Jonathan Alpert, recruited from Mass General Hospital/Harvard, became our new Psychiatry Department Chair on April 1. Judy Yee, who comes to Einstein from UCSF, will start as our new Radiology Department Chair later this month. In addition, Pediatrics Chair, Judy Aschner, named David Loeb, from Johns Hopkins, as new Pediatric Oncology Division Chief, and Department of Medicine Chair, Yaron Tomer, appointed Michael Ross, from Mt. Sinai, as our new Nephrology Division Chief. Dr. Tomer has also strengthened two of our NIH-funded Centers, recruiting several new investigators with assistance from Allan Wolkoff, Liver Center Director, and Jeff Pessin, Diabetes Center Director.

Following through on our Strategic Research Plan’s Brain Science Initiative, Neuroscience Chair Kamran Khodakhah has recruited two outstanding new investigators from Harvard and Yale, respectively, and jointly with Jonathan Alpert, a highly promising physician-scientist from NYU.

Vern Schramm chaired a broadly representative search committee for a new Director of the Cancer Center. The committee recently completed its work, and several excellent candidates are currently under consideration by me and Montefiore leadership.

**Increased Research Funding and New Discoveries**

In Federal fiscal year 2016, Einstein was awarded nearly $161 million in NIH grants, a new high (not counting the NIH ARRA “stimulus” awards received in 2011 and 2012). We will not know the 2017 total until the end of the current fiscal year on September 30, but based on awards through 11 months, I am confident that Einstein will maintain its high level of NIH funding. This is a remarkable tribute to our outstanding research faculty. While I can’t mention all of the individual awards, I do want to highlight several:

- In June, we received notice that our NYC Center for AIDS Research, a partnership with Rockefeller University and CUNY under the leadership of Harris Goldstein, would be awarded a $7.5 million grant from NIH.
• NYCKidSeq, a collaboration between Mt. Sinai, Einstein, the Children’s Hospital at Montefiore and the NY Genome Center, was awarded a $13 million grant from the NIH for genomic studies for children underrepresented in research. Melissa Wasserstein and John Greally are providing leadership at Montefiore and Einstein.

• Kartik Chandran and Jonathan Lai were awarded three NIH grants totaling $12 million for the study of lethal viruses such as Ebola, Marburg and Hanta. Their work offers the prospect of providing neutralizing antibodies against all three strains of Ebola, a true “game-changer” in the event of a new outbreak.

• Joan Berman, whose research centers on the neurological impact of HIV and AIDS, received three new grants totaling $11 million.

• A number of Einstein-Montefiore investigators, including Chinazo Cunningham and Shadi Nahvi in the Division of General Internal Medicine led by Julia Arnsten, have received grants to study and address various aspects of the opioid addiction crisis facing our country.

• Dongsheng Cai, one of Einstein’s most successful investigators, continues to publish major discoveries such as his recent paper in Nature on hypothalamic stem cells and aging.

• Former Biochemistry Department Chair, Vern Schramm, has the unique distinction of having a new drug to treat peripheral T-cell lymphoma approved for patient use in Japan where the disease is particularly prevalent. This is the first Einstein-licensed drug approved for use in patients. This is a remarkable story of outstanding basic science—the study of enzyme transition-state inhibitors—leading to a discovery that progresses successfully through the successive stages of drug development.

Dean Transition

On June 7, I announced to the Einstein community my decision not to seek a fourth term as Dean. Steve Safyer, President and CEO of Montefiore, has announced his intention to launch a national search for my successor this month. I plan to serve to the end of my current term on May 31, 2018, and will, of course, be prepared to provide any assistance required of me to assure a smooth transition.

With an outstanding and growing research faculty, new heights of research grant funding, dedicated and talented medical educators, incoming medical and graduate students of the highest quality, and a thriving partnership with Montefiore, I believe Einstein is well positioned for a successful future under the leadership of a new Dean. The continued commitment of Montefiore leadership, the Einstein Board of Trustees, alumni, and all others who have supported me through what will be twelve years as Dean will be vital to Einstein’s future success.

Allen M. Spiegel, M.D.

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