March 8, 2019

Dear Einstein Community:

Earlier this week, we announced one of the most significant milestones in Einstein’s distinguished history—the authority for our institution to grant its own degrees, beginning at this year’s commencement ceremony. You also may have seen Dr. Steven Safyer’s reflections on this momentous occasion and I’d like to add my own thoughts to his.

Few events in the College of Medicine’s 64-year history—aside from our founding—are as meaningful as this. Our ability to grant degrees as an independent institution further solidifies our partnership with Montefiore and helps ensure our future success as both a top-tier medical school and leading biomedical research institution.

As I reflected on this achievement, I recalled milestones that Einstein celebrated this past year—my first as dean—along with other causes for celebration that we can look forward to in 2019. There are quite a few and they tell us a lot about our remarkable past and promising future.

Historic Milestones—Past and Present

Staying with the Einstein-Montefiore theme for a moment, I believe it’s useful to recount our institutions’ long history together. During the past year, we witnessed many notable milestones: The first was the 55th anniversary of the affiliation agreement that we established in 1963 and led to Montefiore eventually becoming our university hospital and academic medical center. In subsequent years, numerous unified departments were established and our residency program with Montefiore expanded. Together, we have built one of the largest residency programs in the nation, training some 1,400 physicians across 150 accredited residency and fellowship programs each year. Those are all major accomplishments.

A Model of Social Justice

The turn of the calendar to 2019 brought us to our second milestone. On Wednesday, January 30, 2019, our Einstein Community Health Outreach (ECHO) Free Clinic hosted its annual gala and celebrated its 20th anniversary. Established by Einstein students, with support from the Institute for Family Health and the College of Medicine, ECHO offers free, high-quality, comprehensive healthcare to uninsured individuals in the Bronx. It was the first clinic of its kind in New York State and second in the nation, and became a model for other medical schools.

Participation in the ECHO program has offered thousands of Einstein students insights into all facets of operating a health clinic. First- and second-years run the administrative aspects of the operation, while fourth-years, supervised by attending physicians, see to patients’ needs. Its mission aligns with the social justice that is at the heart of both Einstein and Montefiore. The January gala celebrated the history and success of this special health clinic while raising funds to support its continued operation.

Degree-Granting Achieved

When our students graduate from Einstein in May, the newly minted physicians and scientists will be part of the 60th anniversary of our first commencement ceremony—and the first graduates to receive diplomas that will bear the new and distinctive “Einstein seal.” Those receiving a combined M.D./Ph.D.
degree can also take pride in joining the ranks of other Einstein physician-scientists who received their training in one of our nation’s longest standing Medical Scientist Training Programs (MSTP). Fifty-five years ago, the College of Medicine was one of just three institutions to receive NIH funding to establish an MSTP.

These milestones in education come at a time when Einstein-Montefiore is making a strong commitment to our students. In implementing measures outlined in our strategic plan, we will return to our review of the medical school curriculum and propose improvements that will prepare our students for successful careers. We will explore best practices and work in teams that will include students, staff, faculty, and administrators to identify both proven methods and the most promising new initiatives for providing the highest level of excellence in education.

Expanding on Research Capabilities
And just when I thought I had run out of milestones to celebrate, I discovered that Einstein’s Clinical Research Training Program (CRTP) will be 10 years old this year. I mention it because the program represents the perfect marriage between clinical practice and a sound understanding of effective research methods, which is what the Einstein-Montefiore integration is all about. CRTP scholars are drawn from all of our medical specialties and subspecialties, as well as medical students, who are interested in clinical investigation across the translational research spectrum. The program has been eagerly embraced by faculty and chairs, who recognize the opportunity it presents to build research capabilities within clinical departments, which in turn drive innovation in research and patient care.

A particular strength of our partnership with Montefiore is our ability to forge collaboration between our basic science laboratories and Montefiore’s clinical sites. Among the goals of our strategic plan is to grow the clinical and translational research programs between our institutions. For example, our Block Institute for Clinical and Translational Research at Einstein and Montefiore aims to harness the synergy that can lead to promising discoveries. The future looks promising as well, as the ICTR just received another five years of funding from the NIH.

Closing Thoughts
As I’ve told our students and faculty many times since I arrived on campus, these are exciting times to be in science and medicine. The work we do can profoundly influence people’s lives—and there is nothing more rewarding than that. As a member of our Einstein community, you all contribute to our success in training tomorrow’s physicians and scientists and support the research endeavors that can improve health outcomes in the Bronx and beyond.

Whether we’re celebrating anniversaries or not, we know many important milestones lie ahead. Working together, I have no doubt that we’ll reach them in impressive fashion, while doing all we can to improve human health.

Sincerely,

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The Marilyn and Stanley M. Katz Dean
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