Dear Einstein Community:

Since the College of Medicine’s inception—and according to Albert Einstein’s wishes for the medical school that bears his name—our policy has been to welcome all races and creeds into our community. As time passed and our institution evolved, the policy has expanded to include discrimination based on religion, sex, age, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, and citizenship, among other things. At its heart, that means that hate of any kind, toward any individual or group, has no place at Einstein.

Recent events—both nationally and around the world—remind us that our campus can and must represent a safe haven for all its members. So much of the world seems unstable and in turmoil, with gun violence almost a daily occurrence and tragedy unfolding around the world, with a recent example being the bloody conflict between Israel and Hamas.

Here at home, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has reported that anti-Semitic incidents have occurred at the highest level since the organization began tracing such instances in 1979. In March, I shared our concerns over the rise in anti-Asian racist incidents that continue to plague our nation. That same month, the Human Rights Council noted that institutional suspicion and fear of Muslims has reached epidemic proportions. And far too often, we continue to hear about violence toward Blacks by law enforcement, even as America as a whole strives to live up to its reputation for championing social justice by addressing a centuries-old history of systemic racism.

These are painful times for so many, and that makes it all the more important that we, as a campus, stand together and help one another, care for one another, and attempt to understand our differences as we strive to maintain our common humanistic values. Later this week, on May 27, we will celebrate the hard work
and accomplishments of our class of 2021. Commencement literally means “a beginning” and, in honor of our graduates, I ask that each and every one of us take a fresh look at ourselves and make sure we are helping, in our own way, to make the world a better place.

In other words, let each of us take a long, hard look at ourselves—at our biases, our preconceived notions, and those things we may not fully understand, but can learn from. And let’s remember that extremism of any kind only promotes more extremism, just as violence to further any cause is unacceptable and, in fact, undermines that cause. In this context, bias, bigotry, racism, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia are all forms of extremism that cannot be ignored or tolerated.

Einstein is known for the tagline “science at the heart of medicine,” which emphasizes the search for new knowledge in a manner that stresses hope and compassion. We value social justice. We care for those in our Bronx community as well as those who suffer from health inequities beyond our borough. Our view of the world is local, national and international—as we are citizens of both our community and the world.

In this context, we must all be upstanders—rather than bystanders—to ensure that every individual who is a part of our campus community feels safe and secure. Just as we’ve come together to protect one another during the COVID-19 pandemic, we must fight the most insidious virus our world has ever known—systemic racism and violent extremism. Because if we confront and eliminate the hatred it represents, we will go a long way toward improving the communities where we all live and work.

Sincerely,

Gordon F. Tomaselli, M.D.
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