



Montefiore

From the OFFICE OF THE DEAN



Dear Einstein Community:

In 2004, Irene Blanco, M.D., M.S., was a newly minted Einstein graduate. Since returning to Einstein in 2007 to complete a rheumatology fellowship, she has become an integral member of our faculty and dean's office, rising to the rank of professor (of medicine) and serving as associate dean for diversity enhancement since 2015. So today, I ask you to join me in bidding Irene a fond farewell as she prepares to leave Einstein to undertake new and exciting challenges at Northwestern in Chicago, where she will be joining the division of rheumatology to continue her health equity work in lupus.

Irene's star has shone brightly from her time as an Einstein student: She was elected to Alpha Omega Alpha, the medical school honor society, upon her graduation; she received a Bronx CREED Health Disparities Faculty Development Fellowship, which supported completion of her master's degree in clinical research at Einstein; and for the better part of her career here, she's been an Einstein-Montefiore quadruple-threat: physician, scientist, educator, and administrator.

A rheumatologist by training, Irene is particularly interested in connective tissue diseases, most notably systemic lupus erythematosus and how it affects underserved populations. Her research currently focuses on addressing health disparities in rheumatology within the rheumatology fellowship curriculum, and how to leverage community health workers to increase the recruitment of patients of color into lupus clinical trials.

At the medical school, Irene has focused on diversifying both the medical and graduate schools, with the goal of Einstein graduates rising to the upper echelons of research and healthcare nationally and internationally. A long-time course director for our Musculoskeletal Diseases course, her teaching excellence was

recognized with a Samuel M. Rosen Award for Outstanding Preclinical Teaching, an honor selected each year by our graduating medical class.

Thanks to Irene's insights, efforts, and leadership as associate dean, our office of diversity enhancement is a haven to the students it serves, aiming to make all feel welcome and supported. She has sought to provide opportunities for our students from traditionally marginalized groups, supporting them as they cultivate positions of leadership.

Please join me in congratulating Irene on her new role and the wonderful opportunity it represents for her as she pursues her passions as a clinician and investigator. Her adept perceptions concerning our educational and diversity goals, her collegiality, and her genuine warmth will be greatly missed.

As Irene gets ready to leave us, fittingly, there are several events that demonstrate her influence in leading our diversity enhancement endeavors. These include Pride Month, which features events throughout June; a Stand Up to Violence Peace Walk, led by alumnus and faculty member Noé Romo, M.D., which took place yesterday evening; and our Juneteenth Lecture and Barbecue that occurred this afternoon. You can check our intranet and/or our online calendar for further information about these events.

Another Farewell

In closing, and on a more somber note, we recently lost a cherished faculty member, Liang Zhu, M.D., Ph.D., who died on June 7 following a lengthy illness. He was 64.

Liang stepped down as interim chair of developmental and molecular biology (DMB) in 2018 to focus on his health. He had served in that role since 2010 and was professor of medicine and of ophthalmology and visual sciences. Widely admired and respected by his peers and trainees as an extraordinary scientist and leader, he made important contributions to our understanding of how the cell cycle is regulated. His studies on the regulation of cell proliferation and survival by Rb, cyclin/Cdk and Skp2 and the interaction between Rb and the androgen receptor, are highly relevant to cancer.

To honor his memory and legacy, we have established the [Liang Zhu Memorial Fund](#), which will support basic scientific and medical research and training in DMB, along with an annual *Liang Zhu Memorial Lecture*, presented by an outstanding invited speaker. You can visit our development website to learn more about this fund recognizing Liang's contributions to Einstein and the greater scientific community. Please also watch for an in memoriam and remembrance page that will post in the near future.

Our hearts are heavy as we offer condolences to Sun Park, M.D., M.S., Liang's wife, and a colleague of ours at Einstein.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Tomaselli', with a stylized, flowing script.

Gordon F. Tomaselli, M.D.

The Marilyn and Stanley M. Katz Dean

Albert Einstein College of Medicine

Executive Vice President and Chief Academic Officer

Montefiore Medicine