

A Perspective on the Relationship between Jacobi Medical Center and Albert Einstein College of Medicine: In the Days of the Giants

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The story of Jacobi Medical Center and its affiliated medical school begins decades before their opening in 1955. During the Great Depression and the Second World War, little hospital construction was completed in New York City. By 1948, a postwar population boom had created a crisis of hospital overcrowding. This was compounded by an uncontrolled tuberculosis (TB) epidemic. Streptomycin had been discovered in the 1940s, but no effective combined drug/chemotherapy treatment for TB existed; victims lingered in sanitariums or hospital TB wards, and the public was increasingly afraid to enter municipal hospitals for fear of contagion.

Then Mayor O'Dwyer authorized five new hospitals, the largest two to be built first in the underserved borough of the Bronx. Despite considerable controversy, this effort was financed by an unprecedented nickel rise in the cost of a subway token. A vacant 64-acre site on Pelham Parkway was chosen, where the largest racetrack in the United States, the Morris Park Racecourse, had operated until 1904. Before its decline, this was the largest and finest racetrack in the country, with stalls for more than 1,000 horses. The first hospital to be built was a 500-bed TB hospital; it was named after a prominent Bronx doctor, Nathan Van Etten. The hospital was constructed with open-air decks to maximize TB patients' exposure to sun and fresh air. Van Etten Hospital was located at the southernmost tip of the property to keep it as far away as possible from the larger, general medical hospital at the northern end. That facility was named for Abraham Jacobi, who has been called the father of American pediatrics. Jacobi had been a revolutionary in Germany, a friend of Karl Marx, and came to this country as a political refugee. He became the first academic professor of pediatrics in the United States, founded the first section of pediatrics in the American Medical Association, and later served as that organization's president. Although he died years before Jacobi Medical Center opened, his daughter attended the dedication ceremonies and expressed deep pleasure that he had been remembered in this way.

The two-hospital site, known as the Bronx Municipal Hospital Center (BMHC), offered a number of advantages. By the early 1950s, the country was in the midst of the Cold War, and the city fathers were fearful of an atomic-bomb attack. These new hospitals were on the periphery of the city and would be expected to survive an atomic blast centered on Manhattan. They were near rail, water, and highway evacuation routes. Jacobi was built with enor-

mous basements and sub-basements that were reinforced with thick concrete walls and designed to serve as mass fallout shelters. Fortunately, they were never used for that purpose.

At the same time, a small Jewish university, Yeshiva, petitioned the New York State Board of Regents for permission to open the first new medical school in the state in 50 years. Prompted by rampant anti-Semitism in the established medical schools, especially in the Ivy League, Yeshiva's new school would offer a refuge from anti-Jewish quotas and barriers to career advancement.

By today's standards, that discrimination was appalling. One of the founding professors came to Einstein from Yale, where he had sat on the medical school admissions committee. The Yale admissions committee in those years was given two stacks of applications. Each application in one pile was marked with an "H" in the upper left corner. The "H" stood for "Hebrew." The admissions officers were permitted to accept only a few from that pile, no matter how tall it got. The bulk of the acceptances were drawn from the other pile of applications, the ones without an "H." Dr. Bertrand Bell recalls that when he showed up for his interview at Columbia, the dean demanded to know where he had gotten his name. When Bell said his father had changed the family name from Bilotsky, that ended the interview.

When the new school's founders, led by President Samuel Belkin, first approached Albert Einstein, the most famous scientist in the world, for permission to use his name, he was reluctant. But in 1951 Einstein replied in a letter that he strongly supported the new school because Yeshiva promised full equality for all people, regardless of "creed or race." That document, far ahead of its time, remains on display on the campus of Albert Einstein College of Medicine. In 1954, Yeshiva and New York City signed an affiliation agreement between Jacobi Medical Center and the new Albert Einstein College of Medicine. From the beginning the institutions shared a mission. All but one of the founding academic chairs at Einstein were based at Jacobi, and it was the primary teaching and research site for the school. Progress came slowly, but it eventually arrived. The first class at the medical school in 1955 included three women out of 53 students; the next year five women joined a class of 90, which included one African American. Many more women and people of color would enter in the coming years as a greater number of qualified applicants appeared, liberated

by the changing times. To its credit, Einstein established the first program to recruit and retain African American medical students.

By 1955, the anti-Communist hysteria of Joseph McCarthy was in full swing. Many faculty members came to Einstein and Jacobi because of their progressive politics. One example was the pioneering cell biologist Alex Novikoff, best known for characterizing the Golgi body and the lysosome. Novikoff had been fired by Brooklyn College and the Vermont School of Medicine because he had been a member of the Communist Party in the 1930s. He found a refuge and was permitted to continue a productive career in the Bronx. These progressive-minded scientists and doctors influenced the culture at Einstein, which came to focus on primary care, ambulatory care, and preventive medicine.

Eleanor Roosevelt adopted the Jacobi department of pediatrics and was a frequent visitor to the pediatric TB ward. When she visited, she refused to wear a mask, insisting it would frighten the children. (At the time of her death in 1962 from military tuberculosis, there was unconfirmed speculation that she had contracted her disease at Jacobi.)

The founding faculty was illustrious. The neurosurgeon Leo Davidoff, a protégé of Harvey Williams Cushing, was the first chair of surgery. Alfred Gilman became the first chair of pharmacology. Irving London founded the department of medicine, and mentored Helen M. Ranney, who pioneered the treatment of sickle-cell disease and went on to become the first female chair of medicine in a university department, at the University of California at San Diego. Henry Barnett, Louis Fraad, Stanley Levenson, Milford Fulop, and many others made seminal advances in their fields. Discoveries in the treatment of congenital heart disease, neonatal jaundice, Tay-Sachs disease, pediatric renal tubular acidosis, Wilson's disease, acid-base disorders, artificial skin, CO₂ laser therapy, and hyperalimentation for burn patients all originated in the Bronx. The diminutive anesthesiologist Gertie Marx developed the spinal needle named after her that is still the standard used for obstetric anesthesia.

The first successful coronary artery bypass in the United States was performed at Jacobi Medical Center in 1961. The 38-year-old patient received a thoracic-artery-to-right-coronary-artery bypass, and survived for a year.

By the time the Van Etten Hospital opened in 1954, isoniazid and ethambutol, antibiotics effective against tuberculosis when used together, had been discovered. This multidrug strategy rapidly made TB victims noncontagious. Tuberculosis had become a curable disease, and when the hospital opened, less than half of Van Etten's inpatient beds were needed for TB patients. M. Henry Williams soon created the first TB home-care program at Van Etten Hospital. By 1970, the TB ward needed only 70 beds, and Van Etten had been converted into a hospital specializing in the treatment of other pulmonary diseases.

The modern era has produced its own challenges, and Jacobi and Einstein have met them. When the AIDS epidemic struck, many fearful New York City doctors shunned infected patients. Jacobi and Einstein rose to the occasion, and doctors such as Carol Harris provided compassionate care during the terrible early years of the epidemic. Jacobi opened the first pediatric AIDS daycare center in the country.

Under Bertrand Bell's leadership, Jacobi conducted early federally funded clinical research studying the care of critically injured trauma patients. This led to the establishment of New York City's first paramedic training program, its first residency program in emergency medicine, and its first pediatric emergency medicine fellowship program. Bell later led the famous Bell Commission, which reformed the education of medical residents in the United States. Meanwhile, Warren Wetzel developed the Jacobi Trauma Service called the JIT, the "Jacobi Institute of Trauma," which served as a model for urban trauma care.

With the passing of time, the relationship between these two great institutions has changed. Weiler Hospital proved to be too small to serve as the university hospital for the medical school, and Montefiore eventually assumed that role. Sadly, in 1995 Yeshiva ended the affiliation contract with Jacobi, weakening a 40-year relationship.

Nonetheless, Jacobi and Einstein still stand side by side. Predictions made in 1995 that Jacobi would cease to exist proved wrong. Jacobi remains a vibrant center for patient care and clinical research. It excels in such areas as emergency and trauma care, and in HIV prevention and treatment. Led by Paul Gennis, the Jacobi faculty developed an independent doctors' group, NYMA, which pioneered a successful physician role in hospital administration. Recently Jacobi provided five acres, including the Van Etten Building, under a long-term lease arrangement that permitted the building of the new Michael F. Price Center for Translational Medicine/Harold and Muriel Block Research Pavilion. Jacobi has a new, state-of-the-art facility.

Jacobi offers the college unique opportunities for medical education. I believe that Jacobi's and Einstein's joint history argues strongly for continued close collaboration. Together, Einstein and Jacobi should plan for the health-care challenges the future will bring.

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