Contribution to the Festschrift Honoring Dominick P. Purpura

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Dominick Purpura became Dean of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in 1984. Two years later, I assumed the leadership of Montefiore Medical Center. Thus began a relationship that over the ensuing two decades has proven productive and very beneficial to each of the institutions and, I hope, as personally satisfying for the Dean as it has been for me. That kind of partnership is not common between medical schools and their principal teaching hospital, particularly when each is under separate corporate control. It requires an ability on the part of two very different institutions—each with its own mission, priorities, and cultures—to recognize the value of the other, respect the boundaries of one another’s areas of expertise, and work together toward common goals. Einstein and Montefiore have achieved that kind of partnership, and I thank Dean Purpura for his role in making it work.

Key to our success has been the separation of responsibilities, which has allowed each institution to focus on what it does best—Montefiore on clinical programs and Einstein on research and education. While this could have led the institutions to drift apart, just the opposite has happened. As the clinical enterprise has migrated to Montefiore and the research enterprise to Einstein, the interface between the two has vastly improved, and the cross-overs and interactions have become increasingly smooth and effective.

The consolidation of clinical departments across Montefiore and Einstein is complete, and we have jointly and harmoniously conducted dozens of searches for chairs and major clinical leaders. In partnership we operate a vast system of graduate medical education and continuing medical education. More recently, we have worked together to strengthen clinical research with the extension of Einstein’s General Clinical Research Center to Montefiore’s shores.

While Dean Purpura is widely recognized in the Montefiore-Einstein community for his success in recruiting scientists and attracting support for research, he deserves additional recognition for his contributions to education. He created the Division of Education (DOE) at the College, which put curriculum planning and implementation into the hands of committed educators who have a college-wide vision as to what and how to teach, and he presided over the DOE’s Executive Committee, which developed a new interdisciplinary curriculum and created clerkship leaders that set the tone for teaching a uniform curriculum for all campuses.

In addition, in the 1980s Dean Purpura presided over the unification the Department of Epidemiology and Social Medicine (now renamed Epidemiology and Population Health) that brought a solid scientific base to the department’s diverse activities for improving community health. Similarly, in the early 1990s the Dean supported the creation of an academic department of family medicine at Einstein to join with its long existing counterpart at Montefiore, a move that encouraged strong, academically credible research and teaching in primary care. Einstein became the first private medical school in New York City to establish such a department. In the same way the Dean established an academic department of emergency medicine to join the existing emergency department at Montefiore, again adding enormous strength to the clinical as well as academic enterprise.

In all of these endeavors, Dean Purpura has been an exceptional partner. He is not only extraordinarily bright; he is scrupulously honest, straightforward, and dependable. You may disagree with him, but you always know where he stands, and you can count on him to do what he says he will do. Through two decades of working together, I have developed tremendous respect for his intellect and his integrity and enjoyed his friendship as well. Above all I am grateful that what we have created together is bearing fruit—in the quality of the science, the teaching and the clinical care at Einstein and Montefiore and in the recognition our institutions are receiving in the academic and wider community. We are strongly positioned for the future, and I salute Dean Purpura for his role in making that happen.