



MEDICINE *of* THE HIGHEST ORDER

February 2, 2021

Dear President Manglesdorf and Dean Taubman,

We, the undersigned members of the Strong Memorial Hospital's Ethics Committee are writing to express our dismay regarding the inappropriate access of donors to the University's vaccine program. We do so as co-stewards of the vision and values of our institution. We do so as faithful partners to the larger community which we are called to serve. We do so as firm believers that it is our moral duty and our role as the SMH's Ethics Committee, to expect our leaders to be accountable and to ensure that University of Rochester moves ever closer, in practice and in principle, to the spirit of Meliora.

The recent reporting of WXXI's Evan Dawson regarding donors' privileged access to COVID vaccination and the University's subsequent admission that this had occurred offer an entry point to a crucial, and unanswered, question about the moral identity of this institution. The suggestion that financial benefactors of the University might receive preferential vaccine status is a lapse of ethical practice that directly contradicts the URMC commitment to equity and justice, recently espoused in the Equity and Anti-Racism Action Plan.

At a time when the data clearly shows that black and brown people are being vaccinated at lower rates than whites, the very existence of the email, and its suggestion of favoritism, only serves to undermine the ongoing efforts of various community leaders and members within the Medical Center who are working diligently to assure marginalized communities that the vaccine is safe and that it is being delivered in a just and equitable fashion.

That this program was run through the Executive Health program offers an opportunity for deeper reflection. Programs such as Special Patient Relations perpetuate a two-tiered health system where those who are wealthy, and predominately white, enjoy unfettered access to health care while across the city and the region countless others struggle to find access to the most basic levels of care. This type of preferential treatment also demonstrates a callous indifference to the larger social reckoning around issues of racial justice that define this cultural moment. These programs represent the worst of who we have been, not who we claim to want to be. The University's complex history of racial violence will never be undone, forgiven, nor forgotten as long as programs like these continue to exist. They undermine any efforts to speak with a voice of clear and trustworthy authority. Programs of privilege and access like these do not just participate in inequality; they do not just perpetuate it. They actually increase it by adding momentum to deadly disparities in health outcomes.

We offer our voice in full support of the demands listed in the student response to President Mangelsdorf and Dr. Taubman, including 1) Equity in Vaccine Clinic locations, 2) Equity in Vaccine Distribution, 3) Data Transparency, and 4) Elimination of Programs of Special Privilege. We expect a full and transparent accounting of the circumstances that led to “26 non-employees who were well-connected to the University, including URMIC board members and donors” being immunized in a setting to which the public was not invited. The most appropriate response would be the complete elimination of Executive Health and Special Patient Relations. We also expect a process of intentional and critical reflection of the broader culture of preferential treatment that pervades the medical system. As the institution works to become “ever more equitable,” we offer our expertise and support to the leadership in the development of ethically sound approaches that work towards increasing access and equity to health care for all. We are eager to help the hospital, the medical system at large, and the broader University live more fully into our shared mission of promoting human flourishing. We hope you will call upon us to work together.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Abbas MS RN AOCN NPD-BC
Senior Nurse Educator

Kevin Boyd, M.Div
Associate Director, Chaplaincy Services

Marianne Chiafery, DNP, PNP-C, MS, HEC-C
Associate Professor of Clinical Nursing

Carl T. D’Angio, MD
Professor, Department of Pediatrics, Neonatology

Richard Dees, PhD
Professor of Philosophy and Bioethics

Rachel E. Diamond, MD, MS
Assistant Professor in Pediatrics and Medicine

Beth Goldenberg, RN, MS., NPP
Clinical Nurse Specialist. Psychiatry

Lawrence Hargrave M.Div.
American Baptist Pastor
Community Member of Ethics Committee

Patrick Hopkins, DNP, C-PNP, NNP-BC
Co-Director, Accelerated Programs for Non-Nurses
Assistant Professor of Clinical Nursing
Specialty Director of Neonatal NP Program

David Kaufman, MD, FCCM, HEC-C
Professor, Departments of Surgery, Medicine, Anesthesia, Urology, and Medical Humanities & Bioethics

Neil G. Kumar, MD
Assistant Professor, Department of Surgery

Bonnie Matthaidess
Community Member of Ethics Committee

Michael Nabozny, MD, FACP
Assistant Professor, Department of Surgery

Kelley O'Donoghue, MPH, CIP
Associate Vice President for Human Subject Protection

Timothy Quill, MD
Professor Emeritus, Department of Medicine, Palliative Care Division

Sarah Rehler, LMSW
Manager, Social Work

Nancy K. Rice
Community Member of Ethics Committee

Olle Jane Z. Sahler, MD
George Washington Goler Professor in Pediatrics,
and Professor of Psychiatry, Medical Humanities & Bioethics, and Oncology



MEDICINE *of* THE HIGHEST ORDER

Jessica C. Shand, MD, MHS, FAAP
Associate Professor, Departments Pediatrics, Medical Humanities & Bioethics

Margie Hodges Shaw, JD, PhD, HEC-C
Associate Professor, Medical Humanities & Bioethics

Bernard Sussman, MD
Professor of Clinical Medicine, Department of Medicine, Medical Humanities & Bioethics

Natalie S. Whaley, MD, MPH
Assistant Professor
Associate Medical Director of Women's Health Practice
Department of OB/GYN