

Improving Human Welfare

An Interview with Kathleen Kearns,
Senior Vice President – Development and Chief Philanthropy Officer,
Montefiore Einstein



EDITORS' NOTE Kathleen Kearns is responsible for all fundraising programs and the strategic direction for the advancement of philanthropic support. Kearns' 25-year-long distinguished career is dedicated to building support for mission-driven institutions. Most recently with the New York Genome Center, she successfully led development and external affairs initiatives to support the innovative work of the Center.



Kathleen Kearns

Prior to that she served as Senior Vice President of Development and External Affairs at Continuum Health Partners hospital system in New York where she held successive and progressively responsible positions over her long tenure there. Earlier in her career, she was the director of marketing and public affairs for the Hospital for Special Surgery. Active in civic and professional organizations, Kearns recently served on the board of the Hudson Square Business Improvement District and the development committee of the Colin Powell School for Civic and Global Leadership at the City College of New York, among other civic leadership positions. Kearns earned a BA from Boston University, College of Communication, where she recently served as chair of the college's annual fund, and holds an MBA from the Lubin School of Business at Pace University.

INSTITUTION BRIEF Montefiore Medicine (montefiore.org) is the umbrella organization overseeing both Montefiore Health System and Albert Einstein College of Medicine. Montefiore Health System is comprised of 10 hospitals, including the Children's Hospital at Montefiore and Burke Rehabilitation Hospital, employs more than 33,000 people, and has nearly 8 million patient interactions a year throughout four New York counties: the Bronx, Westchester, Rockland and Orange. In addition, Montefiore recently ranked among the top 1 percent of hospitals in seven specialties by U.S. News & World Report. For more than 100 years, Montefiore has been nationally recognized for innovating new treatments, procedures and approaches to patient care, producing stellar outcomes and raising the bar for health systems around the country and around the world.

Will you provide an overview of your role and areas of focus?

As the chief philanthropy officer and senior vice president for development at Montefiore Einstein, I lead the fundraising activities for our institution – one of New York's premier academic health systems. I am piloting a team of talented development professionals who are diversifying and expanding our philanthropic sources to ultimately improve human welfare. My primary responsibility is to help our prospects

and donors – individuals, family, private, and disease-focused foundations and companies – support Montefiore Einstein in delivering compassionate and research-driven care.

We pride ourselves in partnering with donors who step beyond traditional healthcare boundaries with us; in turn, influencing social factors that determine individual behaviors. Funds also allow us to invest in and pioneer scientific discoveries that will inform the future of care. This combination of comprehensive care and research inspires who we are as an organization and how we're training the next generation of healthcare leaders.

What excited you about the opportunity to join Montefiore and made you feel it was the right fit?

My career and personal philosophy are formed around the belief that philanthropy plays an essential role in creating a better world. After meeting Dr. Philip O. Ozuah, our president & CEO, board members and other inspiring leaders at Montefiore Einstein, I knew that I could not serve in a better place to realize that ideal.

Montefiore's excellence in medical care and commitment to health equity, coupled with research advances like developing and patenting immune checkpoint inhibitors that can unleash the full power of our immune cells to attack cancers, make me excited to walk into my office every day. We are only at the cusp of realizing the full potential that Montefiore Einstein physician-scientists have to offer.

A lifelong New Yorker, coming to Montefiore Einstein also was a homecoming for me. When I was born, my parents lived on Sedgwick Avenue in the Bronx – about 10 minutes from our Moses Campus in the Bronx.

What do you feel are the keys to being effective in Montefiore's philanthropic efforts?

Our philanthropy efforts can only be as effective as we are in articulating our mission, accomplishments, relevance and uniqueness of our work to a diverse audience of funders and other stakeholders. Our focus on excellence and innovation alongside equity and access differentiates us from our peers, making us a coveted destination for both worldwide patients seeking complex care and our Bronx neighbors.

We need to constantly be partnering with our colleagues to identify and understand what is novel about our work and how we are saving lives. We also must be mindful about what enthruses donors. What we've found is that people often donate to Montefiore Einstein because they know we are committed to teaching, discovering, and advancing the health of the communities we serve. Staying true to our mission and vision is essential.

What do you see as Montefiore Einstein's responsibility to be engaged in the communities it serves and to be a force for good in society?

Montefiore Einstein not only accepts but embraces our responsibility to support our community and be a "force for good." We were founded by philanthropists who helped chronically ill populations that others would not. With pride, we continue to be a leader in supporting our community. As recently highlighted in the Lown Report, in 2019, of all hospitals in New York City, we spent more on community investments than we received in tax breaks, which we think is essential given our role as the economic engine of the Bronx.

We're also forging new standards to ensure people who have been economically and socially marginalized receive the highest quality care they deserve. In fact, last year, we were the first in the world to perform an HIV-positive to HIV-positive heart transplant. Our internationally renowned physicians are constantly spearheading new ways to care for people in need while maintaining the highest medical standards.

How is Montefiore supporting programs that take care of its community and will you highlight these programs?

Montefiore serves one of the most diverse urban areas in the U.S. – one where the population is global, the disease burden is high, and



Montefiore Health System (opposite page); Albert Einstein College of Medicine (above)

the need for quality care is great. Many funders are motivated to support this work in tackling healthcare inequities and addressing social determinants of health.

One such example is our Montefiore School Health Program, the largest, most comprehensive in the nation. One in four Bronx students are now at a school with the MSHP, setting children up for a more successful future. We also recently began having locations in Westchester. Now more children have swift access to medical services from urgent and preventive care to reproductive healthcare services and education to mental health, dental, and vision services. Philanthropy fuels much of the startup costs for these centers and funds services. These efforts have cut emergency room visits and hospitalizations among these school children with asthma in half. And nearly all students referred for mental health help follow up with counselors in their schools. Before this was available, approximately one in 10 students referred sought help in the community. This program alone is a lifeline for kids, parents, and schools.

Other examples of Montefiore Einstein's vast community initiatives, all enriched by philanthropy, include Bronx Oncology Living Daily (BOLD) programming, which provides wellness and support services to anyone affected by cancer; Project BRAVO Food Pantry, designed to combat food insecurity for high-risk individuals and families; and Supporting Emerging Adults with Diabetes (SEAD) programming, allowing young people with type 1 diabetes to benefit from innovative support efforts. One community project for which we are currently seeking funding is a Mobile Mammography Van.

Will you discuss Montefiore's focus on combatting social inequities in healthcare delivery?

We believe that healthcare is the driving force for social change – and that, person by person, we can lift up whole communities. Post-pandemic, we are doubling down on social

determinants of care – poverty, housing, transportation, food insecurity, and education. As the Bronx's largest employer, Montefiore Einstein has a unique opportunity to tackle these obstacles. Our outsized presence in the borough gives us a unique opportunity to be a hub of social progress and a financial anchor for the betterment of our communities.

As a research powerhouse, we strive to improve health outcomes and reduce disparities for families in the Bronx, who comprise almost 90 percent of the patients we treat in our Bronx hospitals.

By employing research and new care models that go beyond the walls of our hospitals and primary care sites, we are creating real pathways for change.

How is Montefiore funding research aimed at advancing bench science and research at Einstein and how will this effort help the Bronx community?

We believe in the importance of research that promotes health equity in the Bronx and also will inform care in our institution and throughout the U.S. Albert Einstein College of Medicine is one of the top ranked research institutions in this country. Long a national leader in biomedical research support from the federal government, Einstein earned more than \$202 million in funding from the National Institutes of Health in 2022. This includes funding for major research centers at Einstein in aging, intellectual development disorders, diabetes, cancer, clinical and translational research, liver disease, and AIDS. Other areas of focus include developmental brain research, neuroscience, cardiac disease, and initiatives to reduce and eliminate ethnic and racial health disparities.

It is critical that we prioritize projects that disproportionately impact our Bronx community like cancer, diabetes, HIV and asthma. More than 80 percent of patients who receive their care at Montefiore and over 70 percent who enroll in clinical studies identify as Hispanic or Black. People who receive care at Montefiore are enrolled in 380 ongoing trials, providing

them access to the most advanced treatments and helping to ensure the results of the studies are applicable to diverse populations.

Our care teams work tirelessly to remove barriers to care and improve access to clinical trials – especially among minority and underrepresented populations. For instance, Montefiore Einstein Cancer Center recently partnered with the Price Family Foundation to create the inaugural Price Family Foundation Health Equity Pilot Awards. These awards support basic, science, translational, and clinical investigators who are addressing the various causes of cancer from genetics to environmental exposures. Our hope is that the research not only promotes health equity in our region, but also around the country and beyond.

How do you engage Montefiore's workforce in its philanthropic efforts?

The development team engages our workforce at Montefiore and Einstein in most of our work. Our partnerships with our clinical leadership, scientists, nursing and executive leadership are key to successfully engaging donors and prospects in our work. Offering our philanthropic partners the opportunity to hear from our colleagues at the front lines of care is hugely important to ensure we can secure resources that are vital for care delivery.

How critical are metrics to measure the impact of Montefiore's philanthropic work?

Metrics to measure the impact of our philanthropic work serve as the basis for determining success. Development activities have a primary goal of raising money to support the organization, so primary measurement is simple. But it also is essential to recognize that building a robust development program takes time – the average six figure gift takes 18 months of cultivation. Measuring activity along the pipeline of a major gift is, indeed, just as important as the year-end final total number raised – and that activity is, perhaps surprisingly, not always financial. Our engaged prospects and donors also donate their time, leverage their relationships, and serve as vocal ambassadors for our work.

What are your priorities for Montefiore's philanthropic efforts as you look to the future?

Our driving priority is to become a nationally recognized development operation of excellence, garnering exceptional philanthropic investment to fuel Montefiore Einstein's clinical and academic aspirations.

We are enjoying some early successes that are enabling state-of-the-art care and science so we can deliver ground breaking treatments for the most complex conditions here in the communities we serve and well beyond. By increasing philanthropic support, Montefiore Einstein can continue investing in research and modern technology, as well as partner with local businesses to create more job and training opportunities. By focusing on the broader definition of advancing care, we can truly meet our goals in supporting the health and prosperity of our patients and community. I invite readers to learn more. ●