



8 June 2020

Dear members of the Department of Cancer Biology,

Widespread outrage at the brutal murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and many other black Americans – often without punishment or consequence – has led to a crucial moment in our history at which a much broader segment of our society is aware of, and focused on, the problem of systemic racism. To be sure, this problem has plagued our country for centuries. In contrast, the collective will to acknowledge it, and attempts to change it, have come only intermittently. To me, at least, this moment seems different, and it is my hope that we are now presented with a valuable opportunity to support and effect change.

I acknowledge and understand the pain, frustration and hurt that arises when the day-to-day reality of systemic and overt racism in our society is not acknowledged until it explodes and impacts on the lives of those who have otherwise not been its victims. I also acknowledge that – though we vigorously espouse ideals of fairness and inclusion– our beloved campus is in no way immune from the stain of racism. I am also acutely aware that – given the magnitude and persistence of racism in our country – addressing this problem with words can seem empty.

So, why am I writing? First and foremost, I am writing to affirm the department’s unerring commitment – and my own personal pledge – to actions that will effect change. To actions that can advance social justice and make things better for the members of our community. As chair of the department, it is essential to me that we create, nurture and maintain an environment that is welcoming and accepting, that embraces diversity, and where all of members of our community are treated with respect and are valued for who they are. We can, and must, do better than what we have done to this point. We must increase diversity among the trainees, faculty and staff who comprise our department so that our department is a more accurate reflection of the diversity that surrounds us in our society. We must provide greater exposure to science, and opportunities to become scientists, for the members of our community who face obstacles to success simply by virtue of the color of their skin. We must educate ourselves to the perspectives, concerns, fears and injustices of daily life that many of our black colleagues and other people of color experience within our community. We must acknowledge and confront our own implicit biases. We must make things better.

I am writing to enlist your help in achieving these goals. It is my intention to focus the department on concrete actions that will advance change. There are already a number of active discussions underway regarding initiatives that we might take as a department that would make things better, as well as initiatives spearheaded by others that we can support through our active participation. Most importantly, I welcome any and all suggestions that you may be willing to

share regarding things that we can do together as a department to effect change, and I welcome the ongoing discussions that will be necessary to fully explore and address the broad scope and malignant nature of this problem.

I will look forward to hearing from you in the days and weeks to come.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lewis A. Chodosh". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Lewis A. Chodosh, MD, PhD
Chair, Department of Cancer Biology
Associate Director for Basic Science, Abramson Cancer Center