Doctor’s Notes
From the Desk of David B. Agus, MD

I became an oncologist several decades ago with the hope of both helping patients and finding ways to change the way we treat cancer. Since then, we have made tremendous strides in diagnosing and treating cancer, but these advances are not enough. I still face patients every week for whom I have run out of options to treat their disease. It is heartbreaking, and it is why I continue to push for advances in cancer research today.

Last month, I had an incredible experience with leaders in healthcare and innovation, co-chairing together with Fortune editor-in-chief, Clifton Leaf, at the Fortune Brainstorm Health 2017 conference. I am excited to share some of these fascinating conversations with you. We are truly at an inflection point in medicine, and we are closer than ever before to uncovering dramatic breakthroughs in so many diseases. I believe that with the help of continued interactions and discourse, we can continue to improve collaboration across fields and among scientists.

At the same time we shared many exciting advances at the conference, we also addressed important questions about healthcare policy, finance and reform. In one of these panels, I was honored to sit down with former Vice President Joseph Biden to discuss his Cancer Moonshot Initiative (in full disclosure I have joined the Board of Directors of the newly formed nonprofit, Biden Cancer Initiative). During our interview, he shared with me both the triumphs achieved, and the places he feels we still need to improve upon to gain traction and move research forward more quickly (and didn’t negate running for office in 2020 😃).

Because I believe these policy questions are vital, I am excited this month to announce a new collaborative program: the Value in Cancer Care program. In this program, Dr. Dana Goldman of the Leonard D. Schaeffer Center for Health Policy and the Ellison Institute are establishing a partnership to lower the overwhelming costs in cancer care while still encouraging innovation in diagnosis and treatment. Together, Dr. Goldman and I will address the reimbursement system from an evidence-based perspective, focusing on financial incentives for the most successful treatments (see article on last page).

Finally, I want to offer a very special thank you to my supporters this month. I was awarded the Ellis Island Medal of Honor recently, which is given each year to individuals whose “achievements and exceptional service to our nation embody the American spirit in their patriotism, tolerance, brotherhood and diversity.” As I stood in the Great Hall on Ellis Island, in a room full of visionary, passionate and dedicated people, I felt humbled to be among them. Each step of the way along my career, I have only been able to move forward because of others who have stood by me and my team, coming alongside us in so many ways. From the professors who trained me, to the brilliant scientists that have collaborated with us, the patients who trusted me with their care, and partners who have invested in collaborating with our research, each individual has been truly invaluable in the furtherance of our common goal.

Each of you, my friends and colleagues, have also helped me achieve new levels in the fight against cancer and disease. Your belief in the work of the Ellison Institute is truly humbling and empowering. Thank you for the important role you have played in this journey. Together we will continue to strive to make a difference in the lives of patients with cancer.
The Urgency of Now
Accelerating the Health Revolution at Fortune Brainstorm HEALTH 2017

Early last month, Dr. Agus traveled to San Diego to co-chair the second annual Fortune Brainstorm HEALTH conference. Together with Cliff Leaf, Fortune’s Editor-in-Chief, and Siobhan O’Connor, Time’s Executive Editor, he partnered with leaders in the healthcare, biotech, venture capital, hospital management, insurance, and cutting-edge pharma industries to address the vital topic of “Accelerating the Health Revolution.” Speakers such as Arianna Huffington of Thrive Global, Tempus cofounder Eric Lefkofsky, and former Vice President of the United States Joseph Biden joined the conversation on four pillars of health: wellness, intervention, research, and the value chain.

Highlights of the conference included a session with Dr. Olivier Oullier, a neuroscientist and former head of global strategy in health care at the World Economic Forum, who demonstrated the brain activity of Dr. Agus while he listened to a performance of “The Swan” performed on stage by Yao Zhao of the San Diego Symphony. While Yao played, vibrant colors lit up a 3-D brain model, representing the electrical activity within Dr. Agus’ brain as he listened to the music. Dr. Oullier believes that doctors may one day routinely use similar headsets (which can cost as little as a video game console) to monitor depression and other neurological disorders, guiding doctors to prescribe the most effective treatments for patients.

“I believe in the power of now – using my platform and my voice to help others.”

Jimmy “Taboo” Gomez

Another exciting and emotional interview featured Dr. Agus and Black Eyed Peas performer Jimmy “Taboo” Gomez. Taboo shared with Dr. Agus the journey of his personal fight against testicular cancer and his experience at the Ellison Institute. Now in remission, Taboo is taking his private fight against cancer public. Because of his Native American heritage, Taboo is acutely aware that many Native Americans struggle to get to medical appointments at understaffed clinics which are often several hours from their homes. He wants to use his story and experience to help increase access to quality healthcare for Native Americans.

Taboo has also been visiting hospitals and cancer centers across America to share his vision of hope. For this reason, he wrote a song entitled “The Fight” to inspire those battling cancer and bring attention to the disease. “I believe in the power of now - using my platform and my voice to help others,” explained Taboo.

“Taboo and Dr. Agus at Fortune Brainstorm HEALTH”

“You are a beacon of hope,” said Dr. Agus to Taboo. “To see you walk in and say ‘I took that enemy straight on, that is hope personified.’

Among the most anticipated conversations of the conference was a one-on-one interview with former Vice President Joe Biden and Dr. Agus. The two visionaries sat down to discuss the Cancer Moonshot initiative. “The only non-partisan thing left out there is the fight against cancer,” said Vice President Biden. He related some of his experiences with world leaders who were eager to join in the Moonshot's effort to double the rate of progress in the understanding, prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care of cancer. He also revealed his new Biden Cancer Initiative, which he is founding to continue the work of the Cancer Moonshot.

During their 45-minute conversation, Vice President Biden boldly reimagined how the government, academia, nonprofits and the private sector could better organize their resources and systems to work together to take on cancer. “You’ve got to be able to do something to give people some hope,” he declared. “We must inject an overwhelming urgency of now.” Specifically, he emphasized the need to break down the isolated silos researchers and scientists often operate in, ultimately increasing collaboration and cooperation. Vice President Biden
Biden also addressed the need for enhanced data sharing to move research forward quickly. The Cancer Moonshot was instrumental in securing the agreement of ten other countries to share their cancer data with the US. His new initiative will now help obtain that data and assemble it in valuable ways.

Dr. Agus was excited to meet with leaders across so many diverse fields - and hopeful that the conference would increase collaboration and spark new conversations in the fight against cancer and disease. Ultimately, Fortune Brainstorm Health 2017 was an inspiring gathering of some of the brightest minds in the world. These thought leaders understand and take to heart the need to join forces to make hope a reality for the millions of people battling cancer and illness, as well as for future generations who we hope will avoid many of the diseases we consider universal today.

*Photographs by Stuart Isett/Fortune Brainstorm HEALTH

**The Urgency of Now (continued from page 2)**

Driven to help patients battle cancer, the dedicated professionals at the WCC strive to offer the very best care. The clinic has recently undergone some exciting changes, which we have highlighted here.

Recently, patients may have wondered what became of Julianne Yu, who was an administrative assistant at the WCC front desk. The Ellison Institute is happy to announce that Julianne has accepted a new position as Clinic Manager for the WCC. After working at the front desk for over three years, Julianne was excited for this new opportunity. Shortly after her promotion, she graduated with her Master degree of Health Informatics from the University of South Florida. “You never know where life is going to lead. I feel honored to work with our patients, who inspire me daily, as well as the incredible team at the WCC and the Ellison Institute in the fight against cancer.” Julianne is a foodie and enjoys traveling the world in her time away from work.

With Julianne’s promotion underway, the WCC began looking for her replacement. After an extensive search, the WCC welcomed Tanya Regan to the team. Tanya first worked with the Ellison Institute last summer as a volunteer in the laboratory under Dr. Mitchell Gross. She now joins the clinic as an Administrative Assistant. A native to southern California, Tanya received her Bachelor of Science in Animal Science from the University of California, Davis. She worked and volunteered in an oncology office in Simi Valley before joining the WCC. During that time, she became interested in learning how advancement in targeted therapy can help achieve greater outcomes for patients. “I am passionate about helping cancer patients. The WCC has been a perfect fit for me,” says Tanya. In her spare time, Tanya enjoys teaching special needs children life skills and horseback riding.

Tanya isn’t the only new face at the WCC. Jillian Infusino joined the team last fall as an administrative assistant after graduating from Whittier College in May of 2016 with her Bachelor of Science in Human Wellness. She is currently working toward a Master of Public Health at California State University Northridge. She is interested in preventative medicine and holistic treatments for chronic diseases. Like Julianne and Tanya, Jill loves being a part of the WCC team and finds fulfillment working in oncology. “I know that my efforts and my attitude can have a positive effect on our patients. I love feeling that I can help make a difference,” says Jill. When she’s not working or studying, Jill enjoys traveling, yoga, reading and spending time with her family, which includes her Jack Russell Terrier, Brody.

The Ellison Institute is grateful for these outstanding women, who help make the WCC clinic a special place for patients and visitors alike.

**Spotlight on the WCC Front Desk**

* Former Vice President Joe Biden

“You’ve got to be able to do something to give people some hope. We must inject an overwhelming urgency of now.”

*Photographs by Stuart Isett/Fortune Brainstorm HEALTH
Dr. David Agus and the Ellison Institute are embarking on a new joint initiative with Dr. Dana Goldman and the Leonard D. Schaeffer Center for Health Policy & Economics to assess value in cancer care. This new initiative formalizes a unique, ongoing collaboration between Drs. Agus and Goldman that previously investigated the long-term health and economic effects of the use of aspirin as a preventative intervention and modeled the benefits of personalized medicine in the United States, Europe and around the globe for the World Economic Forum. As the Ellison Institute’s biologists and mathematicians are working to create better models of cancer in order to deliver novel treatments to patients in a more personalized way, with this new initiative, the Schaeffer Center for Health Policy will help to build innovative financial models for cancer care.

The costs of new cancer treatments are currently growing at an unsustainable rate. “Perhaps ironically, the reimbursement system we have for cancer care has led to a lot of expense – but also a lot of innovation. The policy challenge going forward is: how do we continue to reward innovation without wasteful expense,” said Dr. Goldman, who is an expert at approaching multifaceted problems like this. A nationally-recognized health economist influential in both academic and policy circles, Dr. Goldman is the Leonard D. Schaeffer Chair, director of the USC Leonard D. Schaeffer Center for Health Policy & Economics, and a Distinguished Professor at USC. He is a health policy advisor to the Congressional Budget Office, the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Institute, and several life sciences companies.

“This is an aspect of cancer care we cannot ignore. That is why we are so determined to find better options to manage healthcare costs.”

DAVID B. AGUS, MD

Dr. Goldman offers expertise and leadership in health policy, whereas Dr. Agus brings his perspective as a physician, researcher and innovator to the collaboration. “As a doctor, I recognize that there is so much more to a patient than just his cancer,” says Dr. Agus. “I don’t just treat the disease, but the whole person.” Because of this, he strives to find treatments that align with the patient’s core values. He is also painfully aware of the financial burden placed on patients and insurance companies. “This is an aspect of cancer care we cannot ignore. That is why we are so determined to find better options to manage healthcare costs and assess value.”

Keeping key quality measures in mind, such as the quality and length of life a treatment provides, the Value in Cancer Care initiative will establish new frameworks for treatment costs and outcomes. Drs. Agus and Goldman believe that they can help to address the challenge of pricing treatments in a way that enriches discovery and effective treatment strategies, while rewarding products with the largest impact on patient health. Driven by data and the most advanced scientific research, this initiative unlocks the full value of cancer care from the laboratory bench to the patient’s bedside. Dr. Agus is working toward a future free from the fear of cancer, while Dr. Goldman is striving to ensure enhanced affordability for a more sustainable health care system. Together, they and their colleagues — along with the diverse stakeholders across the public and private sectors — will be able to accomplish enormous progress toward both objectives.

JOIN THE FIGHT AGAINST CANCER!

Every gift matters in the fight against cancer. By supporting our disruptive, multi-disciplinary research you will help change the face of cancer treatment and significantly benefit the lives of those battling cancer today. Simply fill out the enclosed envelope to donate to the Lawrence J. Ellison Institute for Transformative Medicine of USC or visit our website now!

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