

## Trial by Fire – New Curriculum Improves Patient Access

When H. David Hares, MD, MBA, Vice Chairman of the Department of Medicine, began developing a telemedicine curriculum for residents in January 2020, he had no idea how timely his work would be. Only two months later, as the COVID-19 pandemic overwhelmed Greater Philadelphia, the new curriculum was put into practice literally overnight.

“When Einstein’s Community Practice Center closed, we went from in-person to telemedicine visits in the span of a day,” says Dr. Hares, who had completed the curriculum by that point. “In that first week of late March 2020, the process changed daily as we determined what did and didn’t work.”

For example, Zoom was the residents’ preferred platform for telemedicine consultations, but logging in was cumbersome for many patients, Dr. Hares says. A switch was made to Doximity, which was more straightforward. All patients needed to do was click a provided link at the appointed time and they were immediately connected to a physician.

That was a relatively easy fix. On the more complex end of the spectrum was getting patients checked in and out and supplying them with the necessary materials after their appointments. “We must have gone through 50 different iterations of the workflow,” Dr. Hares says. “This would not have happened without the front desk staff. I think they learned as much as the residents within the first few weeks.”

The Department of Medicine’s prompt and complete support, he says, was also essential to clearing those early hurdles.

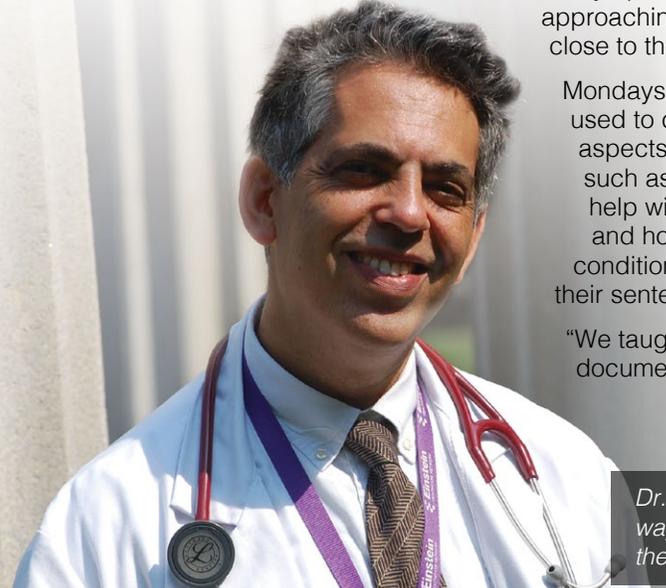
The residents were divided into two teams. One was asked to remain at home while the other was assigned to the Community Practice Center. The move was made with their protection foremost in mind, Dr. Hares says, but it also allowed them to accomplish more through their online consultations, including contacting high-risk patients to ask if they needed medication refills or food and following up with patients who had COVID-19 or who were exposed to someone who did.

“It really opened a new way of approaching our patients and getting close to them,” Dr. Hares says.

Mondays – didactic day – were used to discuss in-depth specific aspects of the new curriculum, such as how to ask patients to help with their own physical exam and how to assess a patient’s condition based on the structure of their sentences.

“We taught the residents to document their limitations, but we

*continued on page 2*



*Dr. Hares helped create a new way for residents to learn—when they needed it most.*

## A Time for Reflection and Optimism

June is always a wonderful time of year for our program. Not only are we honoring the successes of our outgoing residents, we’re welcoming those who are joining our program this



summer. What makes 2021 even more celebratory is the progress made in battling the COVID-19 pandemic and the hope the vaccine has brought to the fight.

It’s been a remarkable year. We’ve adapted and learned so much about ourselves and our program. We’ve also accomplished a great deal. One example is the use of a virtual platform to interview and recruit every member of our incoming class of residents. This was a first and has opened many possibilities for future recruitment.

Our program’s recent growth allows us to improve our curricular offerings while ensuring resident wellness. This has helped us attract 30 categorical residents and 19 preliminary residents for our incoming class in July.

Keeping our residents safe throughout the pandemic has been a priority. We were proud to offer COVID-19 vaccinations to all our residents in December 2020. We also had the opportunity to connect with one another in new ways. Through Zoom and other virtual platforms we were able to bring alumni into the “classroom” to present Grand Rounds. We’ll be exploring more opportunities for virtual learning with our alumni in upcoming months.

Finally, as many of you have heard, Einstein Healthcare Network is merging with Jefferson Health. We are excited about this next chapter and the

*continued on page 2*

continued from page 1

## Trial by Fire – New Curriculum Improves Patient Access

also wanted them to be aware there was much more information available to them by simply being resourceful,” Dr. Hares says.

The curriculum is designed around four standards: phone call and video etiquette, how to provide a physical exam over the phone or through video, how to involve a surrogate to help gather information, and how to document a telemedicine consultation.

Its impetus was improving patient access. Ultimately, it proved to be an effective means of accomplishing that.

“Before the pandemic, we had a no-show rate at the Community Practice Center of 30% to 40%,” Dr. Hares says. “At the peak of the pandemic, it was close to 10%.”

---

## New Chairman Envisions a More Prominent Role for the Department

While Victor J. Navarro, MD, was appointed the Paul J. Johnson Chair of the Department of Medicine in the middle of a pandemic, his vision for the coming months and years is undaunted by recent history.

“I want the department to be on a growth trajectory for its clinical, academic, and educational programs,” he says.

Specifically, Dr. Navarro plans to expand the department’s offerings for its most vulnerable patients, including the geriatric and disabled populations and those served by the Community Practice Center, in keeping with Einstein Healthcare Network’s mission.

“At the same time, we need to grow the programs that attract patients from across the tristate area – transplant care, cardiac care, and advanced pulmonary procedures,” he says, “as well as our treatment of other diseases that draw patients from beyond the local region, including rheumatological, autoimmune, and gastroenterology.”

Dr. Navarro continues to be an active clinician and endoscopist, overseeing Einstein’s Center for Advanced Liver Disease and Transplantation, the only specialty unit of its kind in Philadelphia.

He’s also the principal investigator for the largest research grant ever awarded to Einstein: a study of palliative care in patients with end-stage liver disease funded by the Patient Centered Outcomes Research Institute. Dr. Navarro says he plans to use some of that momentum to encourage more clinical and investigator-initiated trials.

He’s also determined to collaborate with other academic institutions across the region. He cited one study being conducted with LaSalle University exploring vaccine hesitancy and vaccine acceptance in minority and mental health populations.

In the coming academic year, the department will add fellowships in geriatrics and palliative care. “We’re also expanding our internal medicine residency program,” says Dr. Navarro, who serves as the program director for Einstein’s Gastroenterology and Hepatology Fellowship Program. He started the Transplant Hepatology Program at Einstein. “I want to focus more effort on community physician education through our outreach with gastroenterology and liver, pulmonary, and rheumatological diseases.”

continued from page 1

## A Time for Reflection and Optimism

opportunities it will present our residency program.

On behalf of our entire program, I would like to offer a heartfelt congratulations to our graduating residents. We wish you the best in your future fellowships and careers and ask you to stay in touch. You’ll always be welcomed as a member of our Einstein family.

Warmly,



**Glenn Eiger, MD**

Program Director, Internal Medicine | Einstein Medical Center Philadelphia

215-456-4940 | eigerg@einstein.edu

*Editor’s Note: Graduating residents can stay in touch by registering with Einstein Alumni Connect — Einstein’s new alumni networking tool. Visit the site at [alumni.einstein.edu](http://alumni.einstein.edu).*



▲ Dr. Navarro is the Paul J. Johnson Chair of the Department of Medicine.

For much of the above, Dr. Navarro sees alumni playing a critical role, from mentoring the department’s researchers, or even collaborating with them, to financially supporting its visa sponsorships, which he wants to continue aggressively pursuing.

“The most important reason I took this position is because of the quality of the physicians who work here,” Dr. Navarro says. “Second, we attract some of the brightest minds from around the world. Finally, Einstein is an environment that stresses inclusion, innovation, and creativity, which sometimes requires courage to think outside the box.”

## The Resident Who Forgot to Sleep

Here in Philadelphia, Jerald Pelayo, MD, is making the most of the second year of his internal medicine residency. He's developing a reputation in the department as a smart, hard-working doctor with an impossibly upbeat attitude. But as the father of a newborn, the days are beginning to blend.

Back in his native Philippines, however, Dr. Pelayo is sort of a celebrity. In 2011, he earned the top score in the country on the nursing board exam. Seven years later, he pulled off the same feat on the physician licensure exam. Over the three years since, he's become a highly sought-after speaker in the Philippines.

Which is to say that, when he returns home after a long shift, his day is far from done. Frequently, there's a speaking engagement on Zoom he'll turn to next. And that's only the beginning. Dr. Pelayo is also a layman preacher and a prolific pianist, singer, and composer.

"It makes life more interesting," he says of all his interests. "I'm very efficient with my time, and I do have my priorities, my family and residency. Right now, I'm trying to see if I can handle it all."

Dr. Pelayo's wife, a licensed nurse and physician, though she hasn't yet completed her USMLE, is trying to get him to understand he doesn't need to be so busy all the time.

At the heart of Dr. Pelayo's activity is his residency. He's discovered a nurturing environment at Einstein, where his relationships with his mentors have been the highlight.

Dr. Pelayo was drawn to internal medicine because he, "likes thinking about a person's whole being, the interplay of all the systems." He's leaning toward specializing in transplant nephrology — a specialty, Dr. Pelayo says, that is few and far between in the Philippines. "And I've always liked the complexity of kidney physiology."

He admits the decision is not his alone to make. His wife will begin her residency soon. And, as always, there are a lot of other moving parts to his life.

*Dr. Pelayo knows how to make the most of his time.*



## Determined to Find the Truth Amid Urgency and Uncertainty

Kevin Bryan Lo, MD, describes the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic as moments of desperation.

There was little consensus about how COVID patients should be treated, says Dr. Lo, who worked on the front lines as a chief resident.

Amid such urgency and uncertainty, every bit of new information felt like the discovery of another piece of a puzzle, Dr. Lo explains — even though no one had any idea what the puzzle ultimately would look like. This lack of context was what unnerved him most.

"We didn't know how any of those outside findings applied to our own patients, many of whom suffer from multiple comorbidities and who appeared to be at high risk for contracting COVID," he says.

Very quickly, Dr. Lo, who is now the Clerkship Site Director for the Department of Medicine, decided he needed to embark on his own research. "This was a once-in-a-lifetime thing," he says.

Dr. Lo says he received immediate support from his mentors and moved ahead, recruiting about 20 others in Internal Medicine — a mix of residents and attending physicians — to help him. "It was easy to find people who wanted to help," he says. After brainstorming together, he coordinated what they'd be studying, sought approval from Einstein's review board, assisted in collecting the data, and helped draft the studies, the first of which were published within a month of their start.

He says their research focused mostly on what COVID looked like in Einstein's patient population and its impact on the different organ systems, such as the blood, liver, and kidneys. Their findings regarding the use of blood thinners were the most significant deviation from what was known at the time. A higher rate of blood clots was observed among patients with COVID early in the pandemic. While most of the evidence was only anecdotal, the urgency of the moment was compelling many doctors to start giving more blood thinners, Dr. Lo says.

"But this could also make some people more prone to bleeding," he says. "So we really needed to determine the best course of action."

His group's research found medium to higher doses of blood thinners were not the best course of action for every patient.

"During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were no guidelines for anticoagulation in COVID patients anywhere in the world. We're supposed to follow the same guidelines used for treating patients who don't have COVID," Dr. Lo says.

A year later, he says, "we know a lot more now, but there's still much we need to learn."

According to Dr. Lo, his training at Einstein has "pushed him to become a good clinician." It's also provided him with the freedom to pursue his various interests as a researcher. And now, because of this experience, he's considering incorporating research into his career.

"Research has such an impact on what we do," Dr. Lo says. "If this wasn't clear already, it became very clear during the pandemic."



▲ *Inspired by his experiences during COVID-19, Dr. Lo is embracing research.*



## More than Medicine

Einstein Healthcare Network  
Office of Development  
Braemer Education Building  
5501 Old York Road | Philadelphia, PA 19141

Have exciting news to share?  
Want to keep up with fellow Einstein  
alumni? Or need to send us your  
updated contact information?

Please drop a note to Fran Gress,  
Manager of Annual Fund and Alumni  
Relations at [gressfra@einstein.edu](mailto:gressfra@einstein.edu)  
or call **215-456-6278**. Or share your news  
at [advance.einstein.edu/alumni](http://advance.einstein.edu/alumni).

## When Residency is Thousands of Miles from Home

Alejandro Delgado, MD, reveled in the camaraderie of his peers during his internal medicine residency at Einstein, but he didn't become acutely aware of how precious it was until it was over.

"Although I appreciated my fellowship experience on a number of levels, I missed the sense of family I felt during my residency," says Dr. Delgado, physician and ethics consultant in the Division of Infectious Diseases at Einstein.

He and Maria Lagarde, MD, gastroenterologist and hepatologist at Einstein, married in 2009. Dr. Delgado began his residency the next year. Dr. Lagarde started hers, also at Einstein, a year later. They met during an obstetrics and gynecology rotation in medical school, in their native Venezuela.

While they acknowledge their marriage was a unique advantage during their residencies – "It was great having someone who really understood what I was going through," Dr. Delgado says – they were still more than 2,000 miles from their families and friends. Which is why some of their favorite memories are of holidays spent with fellow residents, many of whom were also international students.

"We called it the 'United Nations of Einstein,'" Dr. Delgado says.

"The friends we made during residency remain some of our best friends here in the United States," Dr. Lagarde says. Their families living outside the US, there was a real sense of community among us."

The experience inspired them to practice at Einstein and to help shape the next generation of residents as members of the gastroenterology and infectious diseases faculty. They also have two young daughters, both born at Einstein.

"I find the way Einstein addresses education very approachable. It's a tried-and-true system," says Dr. Lagarde, who also did her transplant hepatology fellowship at Einstein. "As much as I teach the residents, I also learn from their experiences. This helps me stay on top of my field. It's a rewarding experience."



*Dr. Delgado and Dr. Lagarde fondly remember their time as Einstein residents.*

## Supporting Einstein Healthcare Network's Internal Medicine Residency Program

Gifts to support Einstein Healthcare Network's Internal Medicine Residency Program directly impact the training and well-being of our residents. You may make your tax-deductible gift in support of the program by donating online at [advance.einstein.edu/alumni](http://advance.einstein.edu/alumni) or calling **215-456-6278**.

**Office of Development  
Braemer Education Building**  
5501 Old York Road  
Philadelphia, PA 19141