

A Shared Purpose

An Interview with Philip O. Ozuah, MD, PhD, President and Chief Executive Officer, Montefiore Medicine

EDITORS' NOTE Dr. Philip Ozuah is the President and CEO of Montefiore Medicine, the umbrella organization for Montefiore Health System and Albert Einstein College of Medicine. A nationally recognized physician, leader, executive, researcher, teacher and author, Dr. Ozuah previously served as President of Montefiore Health System. A National Institutes of Health (NIH) funded researcher and award-winning educator, he also served as Professor and University Chairman of Pediatrics at Albert



Dr. Philip O. Ozuah

Einstein College of Medicine and Physician-in-Chief of the Children's Hospital at Montefiore. Dr. Ozuah has been recognized locally and nationally for excellence in teaching and patient care, including as an inductee into the Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society and a two-time recipient of the Academic Pediatric Association's prestigious Helfer Award for Innovation in Medical Education. Along with his various awards for teaching and clinical excellence, Dr. Ozuah has also been recognized by Modern Healthcare as one of the "100 Most Influential People in Healthcare." Dr. Ozuah earned his medical degree from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, a master's degree in education from the University of Southern California, and a PhD in educational leadership and administration from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He completed his Pediatric Internship and Residency at Albert Einstein College of Medicine and Montefiore, and his Post-Doctoral Fellowship in Medical Education at the University of Southern California School of Medicine.

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 11 hospitals, including the Children's Hospital at Montefiore and Burke Rehabilitation Hospital, employs nearly 40,000 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.

Montefiore Einstein is a purpose-driven organization with a long history of supporting its employees, patients, and communities. How do you define Montefiore's purpose and how is purpose at the foundation of Montefiore's culture?

At Montefiore Einstein, our purpose is deeply rooted in the mission to improve the health of the communities we serve, with a particular focus on those who are most vulnerable. We define our purpose as not just delivering exceptional healthcare, but also

addressing the broader social determinants of health that impact our patients' well-being.

Montefiore's culture is one where purpose and action are inextricably linked, creating a work environment where every team member understands the profound impact they can have on the lives of others. This shared sense of purpose unites us and propels us to continuously strive for excellence in all that we do.

What have been the keys to Montefiore's strength and leadership in the industry, and how do you define the Montefiore difference?

For over a century, Montefiore has distinguished itself by not only providing top-tier clinical care, but also by advancing medical research and education through our partnership with the Albert Einstein College of Medicine. This synergy between clinical practice and academic research has enabled us to stay at the forefront of medical breakthroughs and provide cutting-edge treatments to our patients.

Our leadership is also driven by a deep understanding of the communities we serve. Health is influenced by a myriad of social determinants, and we have taken a holistic approach to address these challenges. This includes initiatives that go beyond traditional healthcare, such as programs to combat food insecurity, improve housing conditions, and enhance education and employment opportunities in the communities we serve. By focusing on these broader issues, we can have a more profound and lasting impact on the overall well-being of our patients. Our teams are driven by a shared purpose to make healthcare more equitable and accessible, and this dedication is reflected in the outcomes we achieve and the trust we have earned from the communities we serve.

What do you see as the biggest challenges facing leading health systems and hospitals as you look to the future?

The demand for healthcare professionals continues to outpace supply. Recruitment, retention, and burnout have been a central focus. These challenges also contribute to the rising cost of healthcare delivery which are exacerbated by inflation and the rising cost of pharmaceuticals. Technology, as always, poses both opportunities and challenges. As we increasingly rely on telemedicine and AI to meet the changing needs of our patients, we must remain singularly focused on the protection of our patients' privacy against the mounting challenges to our cybersecurity. And, of course, the challenges that we must address outside of our walls from climate change and the role we must play in reducing waste and our carbon footprint to the social determinants impacting our patients' health from housing and food insecurity to transportation and education access.

Montefiore is deeply engaged in the communities it serves. Will you discuss Montefiore's commitment to community and population health?

Montefiore Einstein has long recognized that true healthcare extends beyond the walls of our hospitals; it encompasses the broader social, economic, and environmental factors that influence the health and well-being of the communities we serve. We are deeply embedded in the neighborhoods we serve, and we see ourselves as a vital partner in addressing the unique needs of these communities. We work closely with local organizations, schools, and public health agencies to develop programs that promote health and wellness, prevent chronic diseases, and address social determinants of health. Our community-based initiatives include everything from mobile health clinics and food distribution programs to educational workshops and job training opportunities.

We understand that factors like housing, education, employment, and access to healthy food play a crucial role in determining health outcomes. That's why Montefiore has taken a holistic approach, integrating social services with medical care to address these underlying determinants. For example, our partnerships with local housing organizations help secure stable living conditions for patients, while our collaborations with food banks ensure that no one in our community goes hungry.



Montefiore Hospital Moses Campus in the Bronx

Montefiore's approach to population health is proactive and data driven. We use advanced analytics to identify health trends and disparities within our communities, allowing us to tailor our interventions to meet the specific needs of different populations. This means focusing not just on treating illness, but on preventing it in the first place. Whether it's through managing chronic conditions, reducing hospital readmissions, or promoting healthy lifestyles, we aim to improve overall health outcomes and reduce the burden of disease.

To reach as many people as possible, we're also innovating in the way we deliver care. Montefiore has embraced telemedicine and mobile health solutions to ensure that even those in the most underserved areas can access the care they need.

How critical is it for medical schools to transform their curriculum to best prepare the future leaders in medicine?

The healthcare landscape is evolving rapidly, driven by advancements in technology, shifting patient demographics, and the increasing importance of addressing social determinants of health. The next generation of physicians must possess the skills and temperament to navigate this complex and dynamic environment. Modern medicine is increasingly interdisciplinary, requiring collaboration across various fields, from data science to public health. Future leaders need to be comfortable

working alongside experts in technology, policy, and community health, and this starts with a curriculum that breaks down traditional silos.

Medical education must also go beyond the biological sciences to include training in the social, economic, and environmental factors that impact patient health. By embedding health equity into the curriculum, we ensure that future leaders are not only skilled clinicians, but also advocates for social justice and policy change.

What do you see as the keys to effective leadership and how do you approach your management style?

Successful leaders in healthcare must have the ability to navigate the inevitable challenges and crises they may encounter on a daily basis while maintaining a clear vision for the future of their organization. And they must be clear and definitive in their strategy to achieve that vision. Clear, consistent, and transparent communication is crucial in healthcare leadership. Leaders must be able to articulate their vision, expectations, and decisions to a wide range of stakeholders, including staff, patients, and the community. Leaders in healthcare must be decisive, capable of making informed, timely decisions even in complex or uncertain situations. Strong problem-solving skills are essential, as leaders must navigate the many challenges that arise in a healthcare setting, from clinical dilemmas to operational issues.

I came to my leadership role at Montefiore Einstein with a clear vision for the institution's future. I built a team with the skills to move us collaboratively forward and I have empowered them to thrive individually and as a part of a cohesive team. Ultimately, I have used Montefiore Einstein's mission, vision, and values as our guide and have challenged my team to do the same.

What do you tell young people about the types of careers the medical profession offers?

Whether you're passionate about patient care, research, technology, or community service, the healthcare field has something for everyone. There are exciting opportunities in clinical research, public health, healthcare administration as well as rewarding paths in mental health and social services. Medicine is an instrument of social justice and a calling that allows you to make a real difference in the lives of others. Every day, you'll have the opportunity to heal, to comfort, and to bring hope to those who need it most.

Studying medicine requires dedication, resilience, and a deep desire to help others. The path is challenging, but it's also incredibly fulfilling. Along the way, you'll gain knowledge and skills that will not only transform your own life, but also the lives of countless others. You'll be at the forefront of science and innovation, working to solve some of the most pressing health issues of our time. ●