

A History Of Firsts

An Interview with Peter P. Semczuk, Regional Senior Vice President, New York City and Executive Director, Moses Campus and Faculty Practice Group, Montefiore Einstein

EDITORS' NOTE Peter Semczuk serves as Senior Vice President and Executive Director of the Moses Campus, Montefiore's largest campus which includes Montefiore Hospital and the Children's Hospital at Montefiore. He is well known for his work in emergency services, having overseen the expansion of Montefiore's Department of Emergency Medicine. He has lectured extensively and received numerous awards in patient satisfaction from eminent industry organizations including Press Ganey and Studer Group. Prior to joining Montefiore, Semczuk was the Associate Director of Operations at North Central Bronx Hospital, a position which primarily focused on leadership development and performance improvement. He holds a BA in economics from Hofstra University, an MPH from Columbia University, and a DDS from New York University. He also completed his general practice residency at the VA Medical Center in Brooklyn. He is a fellow of the New York Academy of Medicine



Peter P. Semczuk

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 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 eight 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 highlight your career journey?

I am the Regional Senior Vice President for New York City and Executive Director, Moses Campus and Faculty Practice Group at Montefiore Einstein, a premier academic health system. I oversee the operations of Montefiore Einstein's New York City locations, including the Henry and Lucy Moses hospital, which houses our

quaternary care and is the academic flagship for our system; the Children's Hospital at Montefiore (CHAM), which is ranked among the "nation's best hospitals" by *U.S. News & World Report*; the Jack D. Weiler Hospital; Montefiore Wakefield Hospital; and Montefiore Westchester Square. In addition, I oversee our Montefiore Hutchinson Campus, an ambulatory care center, and our International Office which attracts patients from across the globe. Most recently, I began overseeing operations for

Montefiore Mount Vernon Hospital and Montefiore Faculty Practice Group. Together, the New York City region represents 70 percent of Montefiore Health System's activity.

When I reflect on my career, the accomplishments I am most proud of are the ones where a cultural change was required. For example, in 2013, Montefiore acquired the former Westchester Square Medical Center, a community hospital that saw 13,000 people each year. We transformed the hospital into Montefiore Westchester Square, the first freestanding emergency department in New York State. Closing a hospital is never popular and being the first to establish a new standard can be challenging, but we saw the potential, stepped in and it has been one of our most successful feats. Five years later, we saw approximately 36,000 patients per year, about 100 patients per day. Today, we are approaching 40,000 patients annually. By having emergency medicine certified doctors, nurses, and support staff that you would not find in a typical urgent care setting, we improved access to vital health services during evening hours and weekends – when too many emergencies tend to happen.

Other accomplishments I'm incredibly proud of include Montefiore Wakefield Campus earning Magnet Status, which is widely accepted as the gold standard for nursing excellence, and CHAM earning the Emergency Nurses Association Lantern Award for exceptional care. Both accolades demonstrate leadership, advocacy, research and a commitment to performance improvement. We must be proud of our accomplishments, but we can always do better – and need to leave room to be inventive.

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

Much of how I define my role and career at Montefiore is centered around active listening

and performance improvement. If you are not constantly rounding and hearing feedback from patients and colleagues on the front lines, in addition to speaking with leaders from other health systems, you are missing opportunities to improve healthcare for everyone.

When Montefiore began more deeply expanding into the Bronx and Westchester, I spent a good chunk of time speaking with hospital executives throughout the region and hearing how they would define a "well-run" command center. The answers were straightforward and simple. Always say yes, have an attending physician answering the calls, have one simple phone number to call, and the capability of handling any type of patient 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Based on this feedback, starting in 2018, we restructured our transfer center to be a command center. Now we field upwards of 6,000 calls per year, about a 50 percent increase since I took this responsibility on. Having the right people in place and acknowledging the command center as a strategic vehicle to drive inpatient, tertiary and quaternary growth was critical. This continues to be the case today.

I also spend a lot of my time focused on growing our outpatient care with an eye towards expanding access. If you cannot get in the door for a radiology appointment for imaging or to see a primary care doctor, we are losing precious opportunities to provide the best care for patients and have them engage in the health system.

Our Montefiore Faculty Practice Group (FPG) is one of the largest physician groups in the New York metropolitan area with a network of 200+ physician practices providing patient-centered care in the Bronx, Westchester, Manhattan, and beyond. From 2023-2024, our overall FPG patient service volume increased 10 percent year-over-year with revenue increasing 14 percent. Our Montefiore Einstein Advanced Care patient volume, managed by FPG, grew by 32 percent with areas like dermatology, cardiology, GI and mental health leading the way. Our primary objective is thinking through how a person "wants," not "needs," to interact with the healthcare system. This includes delivering the highest quality care based on the latest and greatest in academic medicine, making appointments at convenient times and trying to establish a "one-stop shopping" experience. An example of this approach is our 60,000-square-foot Montefiore Einstein



Montefiore's Henry and Lucy Moses Division

Comprehensive Orthopedic & Spine Center which opened last year and provides a variety of orthopedic and spine services, including surgery, imaging, and rehabilitation. Note, this is the second time I have said imaging.

We will also soon be introducing an esketamine clinic at Montefiore Einstein Advanced Care in Westchester, so more people have access to medication treatment-resistant depression. This treatment can be incredibly effective when conventional antidepressants have not worked, and it has a lower risk and is a safer alternative to ketamine therapy.

How do you describe Montefiore Einstein's culture and values?

Montefiore's culture is deeply rooted in improving the health and well-being of the communities we serve. This means getting to the core of health challenges we see and finding ways to remove barriers to care. One way we do this is by having one of the largest and most sophisticated social determinants of health (SDOH) screening enterprises in the country. With Albert Einstein College of Medicine under the Montefiore Medicine umbrella, our SDOH screening helps us take a scientific approach to understanding where and how people live and work impacts their health. We then use this data to address gaps in care by employing community health workers, trusted members of our community, as part of our care team.

One of the main values of Montefiore is innovation, which means we are always on the lookout for new services to meet emerging care needs and identifying partners who have similar goals, so together we can make dreams a reality. Last year we announced our new inpatient pediatric mental health center at Montefiore Einstein. The center, which we hope will open its doors later this year or early next year, will provide best-in-class intensive treatment for youth with serious behavioral

health conditions including severe depression, anxiety, trauma, and other acute psychiatric conditions. We could not be more grateful to our New York State leaders and Governor Kathy Hochul for their tremendous support of this project. Overseeing much of our Bronx inpatient care, I have been troubled for years about the number of children and adolescents who require acute psychiatric services and end up in emergency departments waiting for available beds. We have a mental health crisis occurring and the emergency room is often not the optimal setting for patients and their families. Services like this center will make sure patients and their families have access to the right care in the right setting.

What have been the keys to Montefiore Einstein's industry leadership?

We are not afraid to be the first and to be disrupters. We were founded in 1884 by Jewish philanthropists to care for people denied treatment by other medical institutions. Our Albert Einstein College of Medicine was the first private medical school in New York City to establish an academic department of Family Medicine. Just some of the medical achievements we have pioneered include developing the first pacemaker, being the first to successfully separate twins joined at their heads, and most recently, accomplishing the world's first successful HIV positive to HIV positive heart transplant. Being at some of these events and meeting the families impacted by these triumphs fosters our desire to do more.

How important is collaboration for Montefiore Einstein in order to operate as one health system?

Collaboration is incredibly important. Our focus cannot be what is right for one hospital; we need to look at what is right for the region. As my responsibilities and oversight of different hospitals expanded, I made new hires, like our inaugural chief pharmacy officer to have a centralized view and system of medication

safety and regulatory oversight. I've also advanced colleagues so operations run consistently across the region. This allows us to look at what our needs are in a more comprehensive way. As part of this strategy, we are modernizing critical areas of our Montefiore Mount Vernon Hospital, including the redesign of the Emergency Department, increasing its capacity from 20,000 visits each year to 50,000 visits, a 150 percent increase in capacity. By adding beds at Montefiore Mount Vernon and starting to segment the health system by specialties that complement each other, we're able to see how we can bring greater value to patients and our colleagues alike.

Internally, we started initiatives like having one Town Hall hosted and broadcasted from different campuses, instead of different Town Halls occurring at different hospitals. This way, we are all communicating and I'm conveying that we're not individual hospitals, but one system supporting all. The bigger steps and smaller gestures need to go hand in hand. Culture does not change overnight, and we need to do what we can to reinforce forward momentum and "system-ness" in a positive and thoughtful way.

What do you see as Montefiore Einstein's responsibility to be engaged in the communities it serves?

We do not just serve the community; we are the community. Today about 35 percent of every patient in a Bronx hospital is in a Montefiore hospital. That is a remarkable amount of market share that must be respected and is a great place to build. We need to intently listen about each experience. Equally important is getting feedback from our staff who are on the front lines of delivering care.

What do you feel are the keys to effective leadership and how do you approach your management style?

The best ideas come from anyone and anywhere. I am constantly roaming across our campuses because it is imperative to keep ears to the ground. I am also a patient at Montefiore. When I make an appointment or do so on behalf of a family member, I do not give my title or even say I am an employee. To make sure the system works, you need to experience it firsthand. How else will you really know?

My approach to management is transparency in communication and surrounding myself with smart people who are hungry to make things better. I have been at Montefiore for 31 years – and I couldn't be prouder to point to colleagues and direct-reports who have been here for almost the same amount of time. One person does not make change – you need a team – and you can tell a lot about a manager by the people they surround themselves with.

What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers?

Be passionate about what you do, don't be afraid to try new things, and surround yourself with people who are smart, who you admire, and who push you and what you do to be better. ●