

Brian L. Strom, MD, MPH  
Chancellor

January 31, 2020

Jon L. Oliver, PhD  
Chair, Rutgers University Senate  
Liberty Plaza, Suite 1250  
New Brunswick, NJ 08903

Dear Jon:

Pursuant to the legislated authority of the Rutgers University Senate to review the organization of the disciplines, attached please find the “Senate Questionnaire for Establishment, Dissolution, Merging, or Major Restructuring of Academic, Administrative, or Business Units” from Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences. We would like the Senate to consider a process for the possible integration of the University’s two allopathic medical schools the Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and the New Jersey Medical School. Additional documentation includes a copy of the final report of the Future of Academic Medicine (FAM) Committee and a slide presentation presented at faculty town hall meetings in Newark and New Brunswick hosted by the FAM Committee members. I believe we have the opportunity to pursue a bold and transformational change in medical education at Rutgers University that may prove to be an influential model across the United States.

In the Fall of 2019, RWJMS Dean Sherine Gabriel announced her departure to assume the Presidency of Rush University. As you know, I named Dr. Robert Johnson the Sharon and Joseph L. Muscarelle Endowed Dean of NJMS to serve as interim dean of RWJMS. The departure of any leader provides an academic institution with a window to take the appropriate time and deliberation to review the structure, function, and strategy of any academic institution. In this case with the departure of Dean Gabriel, we were presented with a unique opportunity to comprehensively assess the pros and cons of a wide range of options for medical education at Rutgers, we convened a committee to review the future of academic medicine at our University.

As the Senate knows, since the inception of RBHS seven years ago, we have seen a pattern of increasing collaboration and cooperation among our constituent schools and institutes. An early example of this is the integration of the former Rutgers College of Nursing and UMDNJ School of Nursing into a single and very successful unified school – which is now one of the largest and most prestigious public schools of nursing in the country; this was of course reviewed by the Senate. As I have been told by the FAM Committee, Rutgers is one of only five universities in the country with more than one medical school, and in the other four universities the schools are geographically located hundreds of miles apart. Further, this separation hurts our national rankings substantially, since our grant portfolio, a large part of the ranking, is divided between the schools. In this context, NJMS and RWJMS have collaborated on various clinical and research initiatives in response to federal funding opportunities, patient needs, and larger forces in the New Jersey health care

marketplace. Radiation Oncology, Pathology, Neurology, and Neurosurgery, are successfully operating with joint chairs between the two medical schools. A combined continuing medical education program is another joint activity that has leveraged the strength of both schools to reach a broader audience. We now have a joint executive administration between the two schools, which is working extremely well. Our clinical practices and graduate medical education are also coming together, but several core activities currently remain separate, such as student admissions and curriculum.

In this context, I charged the FAM Committee, which was comprised of faculty members in equal number, from RWJMS and NJMS. Members were selected after the solicitation of nominations from the RBHS, RWJMS, and NJMS faculty councils and organization respectively. Eight of the twelve committee members were recommended by one or more of these faculty organizations. The Committee was co-chaired by Dr. Thomas Hecker, Executive Vice Dean of RWJMS and Dr. Maria Soto-Greene, Executive Vice Dean of NJMS. The committee roster is listed below:

- Thomas Hecker, PhD; Co-chair
- Maria Soto-Greene, MD; Co-chair
- XinQi Dong, MD, MPH
- Celine Gelinias, PhD
- Manuel Jimenez, MD, MS
- Marc Klapholz, MD
- Sangeeta Lamba, MD, MBBS
- Chen Liu, MD, PhD
- Archana Pradan, MD, MPH
- Nikolaos Pyrsopoulos, MD, MBA
- Laura Willett, MD
- Teresa Wood, PhD

The Committee was organized and charged by me in January of 2019. My request to this body was to think broadly and boldly about how best we can provide medical education to our students and to contemplate change that would be ground-breaking and not incremental. The Committee was also encouraged to consider any range of options on a continuum including complete integration into one singly accredited school to maintaining the status quo. My only caveat to the Committee was that under no circumstances would it be acceptable for a recommendation that effectively made one medical school campus the subordinate or satellite of the other campus. Each medical school has its unique culture and historical ties to their home community that we must preserve and protect even as we consider structural or functional changes to improve and enhance the delivery of our three core missions: education, research, and patient care.

The committee met and deliberated over the course of 2019 and held four town hall meetings with faculty at large at the Newark and New Brunswick campuses. On January 21, the Committee presented me with their final draft report and debriefed me on their progress and process. Following this meeting, we arranged for two faculty and staff meetings at RWJMS and NJMS on January 30 to review the report and the Committee's findings. The report was sent via email to the faculty and staff of the two medical schools prior to the January 30 meeting. I would like to thank the members of the committee, and Dr. Hecker and Dr. Soto-

Greene in particular for their leadership, for this eminently thoughtful, comprehensive, well-written, and deliberate report.

Based on the recommendations of the FAM Committee, our next steps are to continue and expand careful and thorough deliberations on the potential structure, governance, curriculum, research, and clinical care of a future combined “Rutgers Medical School.” (The final name of a combined school remains to be decided.) If this change is viewed as sufficiently transformational, we may be presented with an opportunity for a potentially transformational philanthropic gift.

The optimal outcome of this process will be the institutional construct to best educate students, conduct clinical care, and engage in research – where both campuses are able to grow and thrive, neither campus is diminished from their current state, and both are best positioned to serve its local community at an enhanced level. The next steps, however, will take considerable work from many faculty. These steps will require substantial effort on the part of our faculty, staff, and administration. Hence it would be unfair to ask this level of commitment if ultimately the Senate would not approve a school merger. Thus, my request to the Senate is to approve the merger now, with the explicit recognition that we are continuing a process where the end result may be the integration of RWJMS and NJMS into a single accredited school, the final arbiter of course being the LCME. However, an irrevocable decision to merge has not yet been made, pending that work by the faculty. Toward that end, we also offer to come back to the Senate periodically, to provide progress reports about where the process stands.

I would like to seek the Senate Executive Committee’s endorsement to continue this process to its logical conclusion, which may be the full integration of the two schools, but may not. Clearly, the final decision as to whether the two schools become one is up to the appropriate accrediting body, the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME). As the FAM Committee indicates, the LCME needs to be consulted closely as we continue the process. Further, considerable work is now needed, particularly in envisioning the appropriate medical school curriculum of the future of medicine, especially given the huge changes in the health care delivery system. While accreditation requirements already dictate that the two schools’ curricula are similar, we need to look beyond incremental changes. We have an opportunity for a transformative process that will envision the future of medicine and how we can best prepare our medical students for the future. The timeline will be determined by the faculty process and the LCME.

As one hypothetical construct, subject to iteration and consultation with the schools, a faculty-centric deliberative process with potentially the following committees/subcommittees: steering, mission, and vision; structure and governance; education - with dedicated admissions and curriculum subcommittees; budget, finance, and administration; technology and infrastructure; research; and patient care. The actual committee structure will be determined by the steering committee of the process. With your endorsement, I would ask Dean Johnson to create a process for faculty from each school to self-nominate and begin to empanel these committees (and other others as needed) with equal representation from each medical school. The committees would deliberate during calendar year 2020 and provide periodic reports to the Senate Executive Committee outlining progress, recommendations, and key decision points. This process will necessarily be further refined with input from the schools’ faculty.

As noted, as this involves considerable commitment for our faculty, staff, and administration, I would not want to make these requests of them without the endorsement of the Senate. Please consider accepting this this process and with it the possibility that we will completely integrate the two medical schools into a single model school and the potential to create the brightest future for academic medicine, one that will serve our students, patients, and communities while advancing our scholarship, research, and the profession of medicine.

I look forward to discussing this proposal with the Senate Executive Committee on February 7. Thank you again for this opportunity and for your efforts on behalf of the faculty, staff, and students of RHBS.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian L. Strom". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Brian L. Strom, M.D., M.P.H.  
Chancellor, Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences

Attachments

c: Dean Robert L. Johnson, MD