Albert Einstein’s new dean shares his plans for med school

Dr. Gordon Tomaselli, a cardiac electrophysiologist who serves as chief of the Division of Cardiology at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, credits the Albert Einstein College of Medicine with helping him cultivate his passion for research. As the new dean of his alma mater, a position he will step into July 1, Tomaselli aims to diversify the school’s revenue streams for research, update its curriculum and—if he has time—continue to carry out his own scientific investigations. He recently spoke to Crain’s Caroline Lewis about his plans.

What made you want to come back to Einstein?
I consider the foundation of my career as a physician scientist to have originated at Einstein. I was surrounded by people who were not only practicing physicians but also exemplary biomedical scientists. The people I worked with at Einstein really pointed me in that direction, and it’s been a constant in my career ever since.

What are some of your goals for the school?
One of the things I’d like to make sure of is that the foundation of science continues to grow and continues to be the centerpiece of what the faculty does and becomes even better integrated with the activities at Montefiore Health.

Why is it important for Einstein to translate its research into clinical and commercial uses?
There are advantages to bringing discovery from the bench to the bedside and doing it in a way that not only provides new care and treatment but also involves community engagement and nontraditional revenue streams. We [researchers] tend to live off grants. Many come from the federal government, and they don’t completely cover the cost of doing research. There are other ways to cover the cost of research, either through philanthropy or novel revenue streams like commercialization. It’s an important way for medical schools to not only survive but to thrive.

Are you planning to continue your own research while at Einstein?
I hope so. My general area of investigation is trying to understand how the heart functions electrically and how abnormal heart rhythms wind up occurring. I still have a couple of federal grants that have some years left on them, and I’m going to try to move the operation [to New York].

Are there any plans to update the curriculum?
I think that has been on the docket for a while, but they wanted to do it with the arrival of the new dean. I want to train people who are leaders in many areas of society. Obviously, they are mostly going to be clinical practitioners, physician scientists and physician administrators, but I think quite broadly about this. I want people to be able to bring their medical training to many aspects of life, including as policymakers.

Should med students learn about health care policy as part of the curriculum?
I think that should be part of it, but I also think we should figure out opportunities for people who really gravitate to policy to participate in policymaking.

—C.L.