Dear Students, Faculty and Staff:

In February, we celebrate African American History Month, honoring the numerous significant contributions African American men and women have made to the fabric of our nation.

Also known as Black History Month, this observance has been recognized annually since 1976, when President Gerald R. Ford called upon Americans to “seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history.” The designation grew out of a weeklong celebration held during the second week of February created by noted historian Carter G. Woodson and other prominent African Americans.

We at UCLA Health and the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA join in this national celebration and remain fully committed to bolstering the next generations of scientists, physicians, dentists, nurses and other medical professionals. To do so, we continue to collaborate with several student groups, including the UCLA chapter of the Student National Medical Association and organizations that represent cross-sections of our community such as the newly created First Gen Medical School Group and the Health Equity Hub. These groups strive to provide mentoring, leadership and advocacy for medical students and aim to diversify the ranks of medical students and professionals while increasing our presence in underserved communities. Despite positive strides, and similar efforts nationwide, the percentage of black physicians, fellows, residents, researchers, nurses and medical students do not reflect the community, locally or nationally. We need to do more to encourage exceptional young talent to enter science and health care.

In fact, according to the American Association of Medical Colleges, the number of black males enrolled in U.S. medical schools has actually dropped from 1978 to 2014 – from 542 to 515. Among the reasons cited for the decline: a lack of role models and negative portrayals of young black men in the media.

We have a responsibility to help change that reality, and so the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA has partnered with several other medical schools in launching a widely disseminated video campaign: “Black Men in White Coats.”

With video profiles of young black doctors, the campaign aims to inspire underrepresented minority students to consider becoming physicians. Our UCLA videos have been prominently placed on our website, disseminated via social media and shared by community engagement groups, as well as other outreach groups affiliated with the school.

While the campaign originally began in 2013, two new videos have been released in response to this need. In one of the videos, Dr. Olawale Amubieya, who completed his internal medicine training at UCLA and is a fellow
in the Department of Pulmonary and Critical Care medicine at Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center, speaks about the support network awaiting prospective medical school applicants. In the video, he says, “I feel like there are so few African-American males in medicine because we just don’t see ourselves. If you don’t see your dream, it’s hard for you to imagine.”

In another video, Dr. Stanley Frencher, an assistant professor-in-residence at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA and the director of surgical outcomes and quality for Martin Luther King Jr. Community Hospital, describes his experiences and states: “We need physicians who come from these various communities because we’re the ones who are going to go back and practice in those communities.”

While the videos are just part of our overall strategic diversity plan, we encourage you to view them and help us in disseminating this message and awakening young people from all backgrounds to the possibility of a career in medicine. In the words of Dr. Amubieya: “There’s a lot of work to do before we change the norm. Every new black male doctor brings us closer.”

We at UCLA Health and the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA are proud of the strong commitment shown every day by our diverse group of faculty, staff and students to provide top-notch medical care and in shaping the future of medicine. To read some of their stories, click here.

Sincerely,

Johnese Spisso, MPA
President, UCLA Health
CEO, UCLA Hospital System
Associate Vice Chancellor, UCLA Health Sciences

Kelsey C. Martin, MD, PhD
Dean, David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA
Professor, Biological Chemistry and Psychiatry