Dear Students, Faculty and Staff:

February is African American History Month. We take this opportunity to remember and honor those pioneers who challenged prejudice and racial barriers to advance equal opportunity.

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 are proud to join in this national commemoration and, in particular, would like to pay tribute to the legacy of Loretta Jones, associate director of the UCLA Clinical and Translational Science Institute, who dedicated more than 40 years of her life to eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in health care outcomes before passing away in November. “By addressing health disparities and promoting health equity — insisting that good health should be a right for all, not just a privilege for the lucky few — she has raised the public profile of health care access as a true social justice issue,” said UCLA Chancellor Gene Block, as he presented Jones with the UCLA Medal in 2017.

We at UCLA Health and the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA remain firmly committed to continuing our efforts to advance health equity and to create future opportunities for the next generations of medical professionals.

To this end, we are pleased to highlight the appointments of Dr. Kathleen Brown and Dr. Valencia Walker as assistant deans for equity and diversity inclusion. Their primary focus will be to develop and support programs that enhance the academic successes, inclusive climate and welcoming culture for all of the trainees — ranging from medical students to postdoctoral fellows — affiliated with the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA.

In addition, we continue to collaborate with several campus organizations, including the First Gen Medical School Group, which strives to provide mentoring, leadership and advocacy for medical students; the Health Equity Forum, which brings together student organizations across the health professions to build a “campus culture of equity, social justice and anti-oppression;” and the UCLA chapter of the Student National Medical Association (SNMA), which focuses on the concerns of medical students of color. This year, SNMA, with support from the Office of Equity and Diversity Inclusion, is sponsoring the Black History Month Lecture Series. Beginning on Jan. 31, the series aims to “challenge health care professionals to meaningfully engage with the needs of minority communities.” Click here for details and updates.

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 in providing outstanding medical care and promoting health equity for all.

Sincerely,

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