



## A Note From Dr. Steed

Colleagues,

As I enter my fourth month at MetroHealth, I am energized and excited by the tremendous efforts we are undertaking to support the essential health care needs of the communities we serve. I also remain in awe of the dedication, talent and drive our amazing staff exhibits every day to provide the best care possible to our patients.

To maintain our momentum, national searches are well underway for several key leadership roles, including Chief Clinical & Academic Affairs Officer, Chief People Officer, Chief Financial Officer and SVP/Facilities, Construction and Transformation.

**Brian Mercer, MD**, a 20-plus-year veteran of the System, has been serving as our EVP/Chief Clinical & Academic Officer on an interim basis since October and has been a valued adviser, collaborator and leader during this period of transition. His term was originally supposed to end in January, but he graciously agreed to extend his time until March. Please join me in thanking him for his dedicated service and commitment to our mission.

I am pleased to announce that **Richard J. Blinkhorn, Jr., MD**, Chair of the Department of Medicine, has agreed to take over as the interim EVP/Chief Clinical & Academic Affairs Officer, effective Monday, March 20. In leading one of our largest clinical departments, he has helped ensure a high quality of clinical and academic excellence and provide support to all patients regardless of their ability to pay. He cares



deeply about our mission, our history and the individuals we serve.

Dr. Blinkhorn, who has chosen not to be a candidate for the permanent position, will oversee the medical staff, advanced practice providers, department chairs, research programs, medical education, designated service lines, clinical institutes and more. He will be a key leader, in this interim period, in driving our ongoing efforts to transform our clinical and academic enterprise for the ultimate benefit of the communities we serve.

In addition, since my last report, I have continued to discuss key health care issues facing our region with leaders from around the country while also introducing myself and developing relationships with members of Cleveland's government, business and health care communities.

I have had the opportunity to share our priorities for expanding upon the tremendous impact MetroHealth provides while also advocating for the hundreds of thousands of people we serve.

These conversations have further validated MetroHealth is moving in the right direction. The leaders with whom we met agreed we should maintain our focus on health equity, behavioral health and addressing the epidemic of addiction. They also agree we should follow our plan to dive deeper into local issues such as Cuyahoga County's high maternal and infant morbidity and mortality rates.

First among my meetings was the America's Essential Hospitals Policy Conference in our nation's capital at the end of February, which included sessions with the association's SVP of Policy and Advocacy and the VP of Legislative Affairs, as well as health policy leaders from the Senate Finance Committee and the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. I also met with five members of Ohio Congressional Delegation, the President of the National Black Nurses Association and the President of America's Essential Hospitals.

Our discussions focused on the need to preserve Medicaid funding, improve behavioral health and addiction care, maintain low medication costs for patients, save nonmedical programs that improve the social drivers of health and support safety-net hospitals like MetroHealth.

In early March, I headed to Columbus to meet with Gov. Mike DeWine's Health Advisor, the Director of the Ohio Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services, the CEO of the Business Roundtable, the CEO of the Ohio Hospital Association, key Ohio Department of Medicaid staff and Ohio House and Senate legislators, including members of our local delegation and leadership of the Ohio Legislative Black Caucus.

On March 15, I had the pleasure to meet one-on-one with Gov. DeWine to discuss my goals for MetroHealth and how our effort will continue to support and augment his broader health and wellness goals for the state of Ohio.

In all these meetings, I advocated for safety-net hospitals like MetroHealth and discussed opportunities to improve behavioral health and addiction services and care and support for birthing parents and babies.

I also met with Cleveland Mayor Justin Bibb and Cleveland Clinic leadership to discuss violence-prevention, smoking-cessation and other programs that address regional public health concerns. That was followed days later by a visit from officials from the City of Cleveland for a comprehensive tour of our trauma facilities and further discussion of ways to address the



epidemic of violence.

As we wrapped up Black History Month and kicked off Women's History Month, I was back in Northeast Ohio as a guest at the Alpha Kappa Alpha Regional Conference, served on a panel on the joys and challenges of motherhood for the Ohio Children's Cluster of Jack & Jill of America, Inc., and delivered a speech on "Advocating for Your Health Care" at a Women's History Month Tea and Luncheon in Richmond Heights.

I continue to meet with employees through our Healthy Conversation internal listening sessions, which included a productive recent meeting with our residents. In addition, I am involved in a Transformation Steering Committee and other committees that were established to address issues raised at these sessions.

Lastly, on March 14, I appeared before Cuyahoga County Council to share my vision for MetroHealth and reiterate our commitment to collaboration and transparency. The presentation was well received, and I look forward to partnering with Council to build a healthier and more equitable community.

Sincerely,

**Airica Steed, Ed.D, RN, MBA, FACHE**  
President & CEO, The MetroHealth System



# Five Pillars

Each month, I will provide an update on the five pillars of our vision for MetroHealth in the areas of Clinical and Academic Excellence; Health Equity; Community Engagement; Innovation and Accelerating Growth.

## Clinical & Academic Excellence

**CAR-T Therapy:** On March 30, we will inaugurate a state-of-the-art vector and cellular core facility that will enable quick, reliable production and processing of the latest cellular therapies, including chimeric antigen receptor T-cell (CAR-T) therapy. With this facility, MetroHealth is the first safety-net community hospital in the United States to offer in-house viral vector production. It will make CAR-T therapy and cellular immunotherapy research accessible to underserved communities in the greater Cleveland region and beyond. It will also support MetroHealth's broader cancer research activities being conducted through its membership in the NCI-designated Case Comprehensive Cancer Center.

**Promoting Safety and Ensuring Quality:** We expect to soon name a VP/Institute of Patient-Centered Excellence and a VP/Patient-Centered Continuous Improvement. These individuals be key leaders in our goal to deliver care that results in the best possible outcomes for everyone in the community. Our quality of care will be reflected in our grades and rankings from national ratings agencies.

**Patient Safety Week:** Patient Safety Week, which took place March 13-17, was a great success. The week was themed "Together we are better, stronger, safer." The Patient Safety Team collaborated with multiple areas, including the Simulation Center for several activities, including: a Room of Horrors where staff members identified multiple safety issues associated with simulated patients, a TeamSTEPPS simulation concentrating on teamwork and patient safety and a patient safety poster competition.

**Approach to Primary Care:** MetroHealth primary care teams and chairs are working together to establish a common framework to approach primary care. The three main headings are Clinical Care, Research and Education. The group is creating a document on "provider expectations," which is meant to clearly define consistent, cross-departmental standards. Primary Care is also working with Advanced Practice Provider leadership to create a residency program, as well as an opioid safety initiative to improve access for addiction treatment within primary care.

**Preventing Emergency Department Visits:** An examination is also underway to identify the root cause of unnecessary emergency department visits, and



the needed enhancements that can be made from a primary care perspective to support this effort. The data project will help create a new model that is responsive to the needs of the emergency department, primary care, and patients.

**Hospital Discharge Project:** Inpatient Hospital Medicine, the Network Service Center and Primary Care are working on a timely hospital discharge project. The goal is for the pharmacy to call within 48 hours for medication review followed by a visit with a physician within seven to 14 days. This will allow for Traditional Care Management (TCM) billing, which will be revenue-generating, and allows for timely follow-up so that inpatient teams are able to discharge patients faster with a handoff to the ambulatory setting.

**Giving Residents a Voice:** As an academic medical center, residents and fellows play a critical role in caring for our community. Dr. Steed recently hosted one of her Healthy Conversation listening and engagement sessions to hear directly from these caregivers. To date, several hundred MetroHealth employees have attended these Healthy Conversations, and additional sessions will take place over the coming weeks and months.

**Colorectal Cancer Screening:** Various MetroHealth teams are also working on ways to increase colorectal cancer screening, using FIT as the initial parameter. Through the effort, colonoscopies will be prioritized for FIT positives, allowing for those patients with a higher risk of colorectal cancer to be seen first. The program will monitor for quality, safety and health equity to ensure top-level care and to make sure it does not create disparities.

## Health Equity

MetroHealth is actively moving clinical, education and research work in primary care toward a health equity lens. Some of those efforts include:

### Addressing Disparities in Lung Cancer Diagnoses:

A research team that includes MetroHealth's Ismini Kourouni, MD; Arvind Suguness, MD; James Finley, MD; Katherine Dutton; and Yasir Tarabichi, MD; have published a paper on a Rapid Outpatient Diagnostic Program (RODP) in the journal *Clinical Lung Cancer*. The program's objective was to improve racial disparities in patients with lung cancer by expediting lung cancer evaluation, and thanks to the thoughtfully designed and implemented program, racial disparities in the timely evaluation of potential lung cancer were reduced.

**Multicultural Dermatology Center:** This new center specializes in treating skin and hair conditions that mainly affect people of color. Led by David R. Crowe, MD, Chair, Department of Dermatology at MetroHealth, the clinic provides a specialized approach to treatment and education for conditions such as alopecia, vitiligo, discoloration, hidradenitis suppurativa and nail unit melanoma. This is just one of several specialty centers that will open to address the various health disparities that disproportionately impact communities minority populations

**Diabetic Medications:** In addition, a clinical/ research study looking at the use of GLP-1 and STGL-2 medications among diabetics has been proposed to improve patient access to these evidenced-based treatments as appropriate. The study will seek to ascertain if there are disparities in prescribing and access to these medications.



Join us for a screening and discussion.

**Aftershock: The Ripple Effect in Cleveland**

March 20, 2023  
5:30pm-9:00pm  
Cleveland, OH

**CHC**  
CREATING HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES

**Understanding Community Needs:** The Primary Care team has also started discussions with various stakeholders in IT regarding the use of population health data to help plan primary care activities that address the Social Drivers of Health (SDOH) and disparities. The goal is to use data both inside and outside Epic (e.g., data from the health department) to identify needs in communities that primary care can proactively impact.

**Black Maternal Mortality Crisis:** On March 20, MetroHealth is sponsoring a free screening and discussion of "Aftershock", a Hulu Original Documentary that shines a much-needed light on the high rates of preventable maternal mortality among Black women in the U.S. The event will begin with a brief reception, followed by the film screening and a

panel discussion moderated by Courtney Gousman, Anchor, News Channel 5 featuring individuals from the film.

This screening is part of a broader community-based initiative to support infant and maternal health. Future activities include special Women and Children Health Clinics that are designed to provide additional support to families while also building on MetroHealth's significant expertise and resources in this area, including our recently opened NICU.

## Community Engagement

**Minority Men's Health Fair:** MetroHealth is once again hosting the Minority Men's Health Fair on April 27 at three locations: Main Campus, Cleveland Heights Medical Center and Ohio City Health Center. We will also host a Minority Women's Health Fair this autumn.

**The Power of Partnership:** MetroHealth is finalizing an agreement with Cleveland Clinic and University Hospitals for the Canopy Clinic, a pediatric facility that will provide specialized care to children who are the victims of sexual assault.

**Healthy Connections:** About 50 people recently visited Buckeye Health Center and were connected with AT&T and partners from device refurbisher RET3 Job Corp., Inc. and the Ashbury Senior Computer Community Center (ASC3) for an ACP Internet & Device Event. These types of outreach efforts are designed to close the digital divide.

**Listening Matters:** MetroHealth is working with providers directly in the clinics to ascertain what specific challenges the patients in those clinics experience. Ultimately, the goal is to create community advisory panels that would allow patients to provide feedback on inequities they are facing.

**N.E.W. KIDZ:** We're thrilled to announce the launch of N.E.W. KIDZ. In partnership with the Urban Community School and Lincoln-West School of Science and Health, the Nutrition, Education, and Wellness (NEW) program will help teach children and their families how to focus on health instead of weight.

## Innovation

**Positive Peers:** An app created by MetroHealth staff is gaining national attention from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for its positive impact on young people living with HIV. In 2016, Ann K. Avery, MD, and her team, including Project Director, Jennifer McMillen Smith, launched an app that would help patients aged 13 to 34 navigate through the complicated feelings and questions that come up. The



app, called Positive Peers, scaled up to the national level in March 2020, giving hope to the people who are looking for support in processing and dealing with this

disease. The app offers health management tools, health information and a social platform where patients can post on a community bulletin board or direct-message other users.

**Innovative Scheduling:** There is incredible potential to rethink primary care delivery systems and the way MetroHealth utilizes them. We are looking at ways to offer better scheduling so that a mother with two children can have both kids seen on the same day with appointments back-to-back. We are also investigating opportunities to better coordinate additional lines of business so that if a child is coming in for a well



checkup, they can have a dental visit right after. This initiative is being developed from the perspective of what is best for the patient (rather than what is easiest for the provider), which will be critical to innovating better systems and accelerating growth.

## Accelerating Growth

**CLE-Care:** The City of Cleveland has added CLE-Care as a health insurance option for its 6,400 employees, offering significant savings along with high quality care to its workers while enhancing patient growth opportunities for MetroHealth. CLE-Care combines the expertise of MetroHealth's doctors and health care providers with Medical Mutual's expertise in managing benefits.

**Growth Through an Equity Lens:** On February 2, MetroHealth completed the stem cell collection for the first patient accepted into the new Bone Marrow Transplant program. The transplant of stem cells for a second patient in the program is scheduled to take place in mid-April.

The Bone Marrow Transplant program was created for patients who need a transplant but who are unable to take part in other hospital programs. Patients who lack reliable transportation for the many required appointments, access to healthy foods and other resources are often turned away. The program has been developed by William W. Tse, MD, and Tamila L. Kindwall-Keller, DO.

## Internal Initiatives

**Addressing the Workforce Shortage:** The Talent Acquisition team has done a spectacular job with our recent hiring events. Last month's event at The Glick Center drew more than 170 candidates.

The recent event at Cleveland Heights Medical Center, which was focused on filling open roles at all our East Side locations, drew more than 100 interested individuals. Our team has already extended several offers.

### **Strengthening Safety and Communication:**

A key part of ensuring our employees feel safe is that they also feel informed. Representatives from Communications, Emergency Management, Public Safety and other departments are working on a new crisis communications plan, and a special committee is being formed to give caregivers a formal venue to share their ideas and concerns about safety.

**Multi-Campus Facility Plan:** Driven by employee feedback, we are putting together a new multi-campus master facilities plan. That plan will focus on optimizing space in The Glick Center, revisiting our approach



to APEX, enhancing our ambulatory footprint and reevaluating what to do with our existing buildings. This includes better planning for conference space and offices for providers and support staff.

## Marketing Focus

March is Colon Cancer Awareness Month, and we are running an awareness campaign to encourage our patients and community to get checked. Content will also be highlighted throughout the year as part of the #gotoknow campaign raising awareness about preventative screenings.

The 2023 Heart Health Month concluded February 28, with excellent engagement across platforms:

- Digital billboards ran in Northeast Ohio for three weeks. Week three's billboard had both English and Spanish versions.
- More than 200,000 people received our second installment of the BeSimplyWell e-Newsletter focused on heart health.
- The Virtual Health Talk, "What Women of Color Need to Know About Heart Health," took place on February 28 and was hosted by Dr. Meera Kondapaneni.

Continued efforts throughout the year will reinforce the momentum built from the campaign, with additional WKYC Good Company segments, an Afib campaign, and more.

## Money Matters

**Finances At-a-Glance:** MetroHealth remains financially stable, especially compared to other safety-

net hospitals around the country. However, we are not shielded from the impacts and challenges of the post-COVID world.

Like most safety-net hospitals, our margins are always going to be small, largely because of our payor mix: About two-thirds to three-quarters of our patients are on Medicare, Medicaid or uninsured. Additionally, like every health system in the country, we are facing additional stresses. Workforce shortages and inflation are pushing our costs up faster than our income.

**Cash On Hand/Debt Service:** The two covenants for the Series 2017 bonds are Days Cash on Hand (DCOH) and Debt Service Coverage Ratio (DSCR). As of February 28, 2023, DCOH was 165 days, and DCSR was 5.96x, both above their compliance requirements of 75 days and 1.00x, respectively.

**Market Trends:** While the stock market started on a positive note in 2023, a negative February diminished the market's overall year-to-date returns. In February, the System's unrestricted investments were down approximately 1.1% but were still positive 1.2% for the year compared to being down 5.7% in 2022.

**A Partner for Hope:** The MetroHealth Foundation has launched an effort to raise \$30,000 to support a second K9 Unit. The new dog will join Hope the Dog, who keeps our patients, visitors, and staff safe. More information on this effort can be found at Partner for Hope | The MetroHealth System.

**Additional Philanthropic Support:** The Institute for H.O.P.E. continues to receive strong support from the philanthropic community with The Harry K. and Emma R. Fox Charitable Foundation and the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation granting a total of \$25,000 in support to the Food as Medicine and SAFE programs, respectively. Also, former MetroHealth Foundation Board member, Tim King, and his wife, Carol, made a generous gift to support the MetroHealth Rehabilitation Institute and its equipment fund.

## Awards & Recognition

We are thrilled to announce our talented staff has received several recognitions and awards.

**Kevin Kilgore, PhD**, Staff Scientist in the Departments of Orthopedics and Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation and the MetroHealth Center for Rehabilitation Research, has been elected to the prestigious National Academy of Inventors.

MetroHealth's VP/CIO **David Fiser, MBA, FABC**, is a finalist in the Ohio ORBIE Awards, the prestigious technology recognition program that honors tech executives that demonstrate leadership excellence.



In February, the American Institute of Architects bestowed its highest honor on MetroHealth's **Walter Jones**, when it elevated him to its College of Fellows, a distinction only 3% of member-architects ever achieve.

MetroHealth was recognized with **2022 Magna Cum Laude Honor Roll** status from the Epic Corporation, placing us in the top 5% of all Epic customers nationally for the number of times we've been on the Honor Roll. This significant achievement acknowledges the work done by our Clinical Informatics and Information Services teams. But the real prize is how our patients and colleagues benefit from the best practices it took to achieve this milestone. Epic's Honor Roll Good Maintenance Grant Program is a recognition program based on strategies, lessons learned, and best practices distilled from Epic's experience serving well-respected health care organizations.

The Ohio Chapter of the American College of Cardiology Fellowship Team competed in a Jeopardy competition. This team was led by our own **Ahmad Jabri, MD**. The team took second place at the National ACC Jeopardy competition.

February's Daisy Award for Extraordinary Nurses was presented to a group of three dedicated nurses: **Kevin Boyd, RN; Julianna Galicz, RN, and Rachel Pierce, RN**. They were nominated a patient's sibling for their attention to detail and the compassionate care they provided.

MetroHealth's President & CEO **Airica Steed, Ed.D, RN, MBA, FACHE**, was named one of Modern Healthcare's [Top 20 Women Leaders for 2023](#) after previously being named one of the publication's Top Women to Watch in 2023. In addition, she received the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Award from the Chicago Health Executives Forum, a chapter of the American College of Healthcare Executives.

**MetroHealth Medical Center** was recognized for maintaining 20 years of excellence through accreditation by IAC Echocardiography (formerly ICAEL). The accreditation is awarded to an elite group of facilities that demonstrates a continued commitment to offering quality patient care.

The **MetroHealthy** wellness initiative has been recognized with a Platinum Award for the third consecutive year from the Healthy Business Council of Ohio. The Healthy Worksite Award recognizes Ohio employers who demonstrate a commitment to employee wellness through comprehensive worksite health promotion and wellness programs. Applicants are scored on the extent their wellness programs facilitate and encourage employee health, enhance productivity and ensure a healthy work environment. Last year, 72% of our benefit-eligible employees and 53% of our benefit-eligible spouses participated in the program.

The MetroHealth System is [being held up](#) as national model for its ability to deliver quality care at a controlled cost. A recent article published in **Health Affairs Forefront** explores how value-based care payment models can drive innovation and improve quality. The authors – one of whom is Mark McClellan, former administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services – explain how MetroHealth has successfully embraced value-based arrangements to transform the way it cares for the community.

**The Institute for H.O.P.E.** has a prominent role in the latest edition of the monthly online journal Catalyst Innovations in Care Delivery, a publication of the **New England Journal of Medicine**. Institute for H.O.P.E.



President Sue Fuehrer and others authored the leading "Viewpoints" article, which details MetroHealth's unique programs, including Calls for HOPE, the Opportunity Center and the Trauma Recovery Center. [You can read the piece here.](#)

## Spotlight on MetroHealth

Each month, we will round up media coverage that features MetroHealth System and our employees.

MetroHealth was featured in ideastream story, "[New murals celebrate Latino heritage in Clark-Fulton](#)"

MetroHealth was featured in Axios story, "[Clark-Fulton is Cleveland's hot new destination for murals.](#)"

[MetroHealth Cleveland Heights Behavioral Health Hospital: Photo Tour](#) – Healthcare Design Magazine

MetroHealth's Laura Shefner, MD, published her latest column – "[Managing Toddler Meltdowns](#)" – in the Cleveland Jewish News

MetroHealth President & CEO Dr. Airica Steed was mentioned in HealthLeaders Media story, "[Celebrate Women Healthcare Leaders During International Women's Day 2023.](#)"

[MetroHealth app helps young people diagnosed with HIV](#) – 19 News

Dr. Steed is the featured guest on The Beryl Institute's "[To Care Is Human](#)" podcast series.

[MetroHealth will host free showing of documentary that explores infant mortality](#) – News 5 Cleveland