

From: Office of the President <news@mmc.edu>

Sent: Friday, June 7, 2019 12:46

Subject: Meharry announces the Center for the Study of Social Determinants of Health



Dear fellow Meharrians:

I want to share with you important news: Today, Meharry Medical College is launching the Meharry Center for the Study of Social Determinants of Health. Our new Center will advance our mission by exploring the impact of social determinants – including smoking, alcohol use, food instability, and poverty – on underserved communities, and crafting programs and policies to help people lead healthier lives.

Our first initiative at the Center will involve the study of tobacco and nicotine-related products through a five-year, \$7.5 million independent research grant from JUUL Labs, Inc. I understand the involvement of JUUL may give pause, just as it first did me. We have, however, spent countless hours airing our concerns with JUUL, and are now confident in moving forward because of the critical importance of the work we will do and the assurance we have that it will be entirely independent.

As someone immersed in the Meharry mission, you are aware that we have historically found ourselves occupying the last seat at the table when research is conducted on emerging public health issues that profoundly affect minority communities. We have paid a heavy price for being shut out. Targeted unscrupulously by the tobacco industry, our community is replete with smokers – six million African Americans nationwide. The diseases that kill or cripple our patients at far higher rates than other populations – hypertension, diabetes, cardio-vascular and lung disease, and cancer – are exacerbated by smoking.

This grant will be a unique opportunity to redress the harm that's been done, making it possible for Meharry students and researchers to engage in significant, original study of tobacco and nicotine-related products. We will be integrally involved in charting a

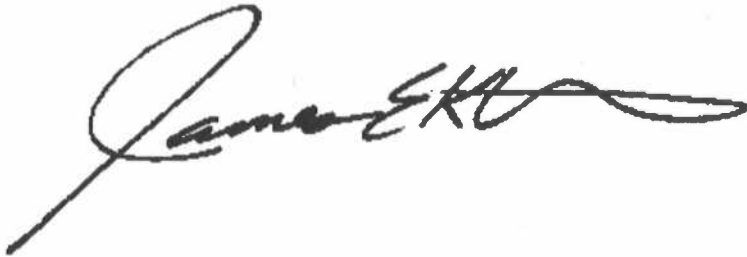
course for education, prevention and policy relative to their use. We also will address growing trends in the use of e-cigarettes and vaping devices among our youth.

We have been explicit with JUUL executives that we must and will always operate with complete autonomy and authority, and will publish our findings independently, no matter the consequences to their company. JUUL has agreed to and endorses these conditions. I can tell you unequivocally that the resources we garner will only be used in the best interests of the people we serve.

The new Center will be housed in the School of Graduate Studies and Research, and we anticipate that research will begin in the fall once the topics have been solidified. We have engaged an executive recruiting firm to conduct a nationwide search to identify a scientist to oversee programs at the Center, and will keep you apprised of the outcome of that search.

I greatly value your ideas, input and dedication to Meharry Medical College and to the people we serve. We are, and always will be, champions for the health and welfare of people whose advocates have been few and far between. No matter where our research takes us or who our supporters are, this will never change. I look forward to updating you on this new initiative and others as we continue to do great work together in Nashville and around the world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James E.K. Hildreth Sr.", with a large, stylized initial "J" and a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

James E.K. Hildreth Sr., Ph.D., M.D.
President and CEO

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