



# The Kern Institute for the Transformation of Medical Education is Not a “Black Box”!

by Adina Kalet, MD, MPH

I met sixty MCW folks over the course of three recruitment visits while I was being considered as the Director of the Robert D. and Patricia E. Kern Institute for the Transformation of Medical Education. I was intrigued by this remarkable and unique leadership opportunity but still wasn't certain that the potential accomplishments of the position would be worth the personal risks I would take.

I had done my homework. I had heard the skepticism over what the Kern Institute was trying to accomplish (“black box,” “cash cow”). I had listened to the questions about whether or not the Kern Institute would be worthy of the investment made by the Kern Family Foundation. I was aware of the MCW community's uncertainty if it would be able to live up to the high expectations.

Then, a senior MCW leader (who shall not be named to protect the innocent!) asked me point blank, “*Why would you take a job where you have all this responsibility but no authority?*” I let out a short laugh at his stunning question. After all, what was he implying? That a well-funded institute with a critically important mission would have “no authority”?

The gauntlet had been thrown! I cannot remember exactly what I said, but I hope I answered, “Because, I want to work with people who are so passionate about the potential for medical education that they are willing and eager to do difficult, transformative work.” In that moment, I made my choice. It is a curse! I can never walk away from a challenge.

You see, eighteen months ago, the Kern Institute was mostly pure potential energy. There was the lofty triple aim framework of Character, Competence and Caring. Cheryl Maurana, Kern's inaugural, reliable, and effective leader, had

assembled a team of five remarkable Pillar Directors, twenty-four talented faculty members, a small but well-prepared staff, six medical school partners, and what seemed like plenty of resources. Things were poised to take off.

We have accomplished much in the past months. The current challenges have, if anything, sharpened our focus and our message. The tide is turning.

For those of you who are still dubious or unclear about the Kern Institute's work, I invite you to read this week's (and each successive week's) issue of the *Transformational Times* in full. Check our [archives](#). This is Issue Sixteen of the *Transformational Times*. Click on "Letter to the Editor" button and share your thoughts. Engage with us in transformative conversations, bring your ideas, and challenge us to do even better work.

We have all been sheltering-at-home for three months. This issue is published on Juneteeth, twenty-five days after the murder of George Floyd. We have been learning from almost four weeks of diverse, antiracism protests that have grown organically in both large and small communities all across our nation. These are dynamic times. Simultaneously, the Kern Institute's work is in full gear. Read, react, submit. Engage with us! Here is my advice:

- This week, consider submitting a "Letter to the Editor" reflecting your response to the prose poem by **Dr. Sherry Ann Brown**, Director of Cardio-Oncology Program, as she "plainly and simply" hopes "you are NOT well."
- Send us your thoughts on medical student **Scott Lamm's** question, "Can We Agree This Is a Problem?" when anti-racism is not ingrained in our early education, leaving adults struggling to rapidly incorporate new ideas and change lifelong habits.
- Think deeply about how our mind sets need to change as you read the "Call to Action" from **Cassie Ferguson, MD**, Kern Student Pillar Director, as she asks us to begin "*Rethinking Remediation at MCW*" using an *equity lens* and systems-level approach to ensure every student is treated fairly

and that we don't needlessly activate internalized biases that cause pain and doubt.

- Learn about the sixteen projects the Kern Institute is funding through this year's Transformational Ideas Initiative (TI2) addressing the campus climate for underrepresented minority (URM) students in the essay by **Chris Decker, MD**, Kern Culture & Systems Pillar Director, and **Julia Schmitt**, Kern Program Manager. Where might you make a connection and be part of these efforts toward meaningful change?
- Notice how **Lara Voigt, MD**, Associate Director of the Bedside Procedure Service and brand-new mother demonstrates the conscious antiracism process white people like her must do if we want to become good parents to humans born into this moment in history. What does that make you think about? How does it make you feel?
- **Alexandra Harrington, MD**, Kern Faculty Pillar Director wonders "*What part of your character are you working on today?*" She gracefully accomplishes the difficult task of clearly defining character education and sharing some critical lessons learned from K-12 educators at a national conference. She says, "I'm working on my bravery these days ... I want to be a leader that speaks up when it's hard to and challenges things that may not be so easy to challenge." What are you working on? What might you want to do differently today?
- And finally, consider the transformative impact of the answer to the question "*Why is the Kern Institute's Medical Education Data Scientist Smiling?*" Wouldn't you be smiling if you, like **Tavinder K. Ark, PhD**, Director of the new Kern Medical Education Data Science Laboratory, could do meaningful, rigorous, convincing work you love with people who are on a mission to educate the next generation of health care professionals?

Who says we don't have the "authority" to transform medical education? We are passionate to be part of the change. If not us, then who?

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