Dear Dr. Martin:

Currently, the University of Virginia academic calendar recognizes 7 federal holidays for which its classes are closed – New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day. The UVA Health System clinics are closed on 6 of those holidays. The lone exception is MLK Day. There is no defensible explanation for this. The conclusion that must inevitably be drawn from this inequality is that the issues for which we celebrate the life and time of Dr. Martin Luther King are not as important to the University as are the issues for which we celebrate the other holidays on which the clinics are closed.

One of us, Greg Townsend, had this experience:

"It is Martin Luther King Jr. Day, 2015. It is the first time that I will be celebrating MLK Day in my new position as Associate Dean for Diversity and Medical Education for the School of Medicine. It is also the first time that I have clinic on an MLK Day, as I have recently started attending in a clinic serving patients with hepatitis C infection on Mondays. However, I have been in the hepatitis C clinic and other UVA clinics long enough to know that the clinics are closed on many federal holidays. So I assumed that the clinic would be closed on MLK Day. I was therefore quite surprised when, in the middle of the MLK Day activities in which I was participating, I received a page from one of the clinic nurses to let me know that my patient was waiting for me. After a brief conversation, I cut short my MLK Day activities and hustled over to clinic.

After seeing that first patient, I turned to my colleague who was also seeing patients in clinic that day and remarked to her that I was astonished that the clinic was open. She related to me the following statement that her first patient had made to her. After introductions, the patient, an elderly African American man from Charlottesville, said this, "I remember when this [the Clinical Department Wing, formerly the Private Clinics Wing, where the hepatitis C clinic is housed] was for white folks only. And I remember when this hospital was segregated. [pause, sigh] And now you're open on Martin Luther King Day."

The conclusion drawn by this gentleman was inescapably clear. In a state in which, for years, Dr. King's birthday was "honored" on the same day as those of two Confederate icons, in a city which chose to close its public schools rather than integrate them, stands the University of Virginia. An institution founded by a man who, despite writing that "all men are created equal", was a slaveholder. An institution that was built by slaves. An institution that closed its doors to African American students and faculty, and treated its white and black patients in separate facilities, for almost a century and a half after its founding. An institution that was a

bastion of eugenics for several decades in the late 19th through mid-20th century, and which still honors those who were advocates of eugenics, such as Paul Brandon Barringer and Robert Bennett Bean. An institution from which graduated Public Health Service surgeon general Hugh Cumming and assistant surgeons general Taliaferro Clark and Raymond A. Vonderlehr, the physicians who were responsible for initiating the infamous Tuskegee syphilis study. An institution from which graduated a leader of the "alt-right" movement who recently led a white nationalist rally with burning torches in the city of Charlottesville.

In the mind of the African American patient who was seen in the hepatitis C clinic on MLK Day, this institution had demonstrated, once again, that either it is ignorant of, or it doesn't care about, its legacy and the feelings of its African American faculty, staff, trainees, patients, and community partners.

We all know that the Health System has made great strides in addressing the issues of diversity and inclusion. Our medical student body is one of the more diverse in the country. Our senior leadership includes a Dean and a CEO who are African American, both of which are rarities. One of our buildings, formerly named after eugenicist Harvey Jordan, was recently renamed after School of Medicine graduate Vivian Pinn, who was the only African American and only woman in her class. It would be a tragedy if the efforts that have been made and are ongoing in this regard are lost in the perception that UVA is insensitive to its African American constituents.

Dr. King fought for, and died for, the notion that "all men are created equal", and that all humans should be treated as such. It is time – it is past time – that the holiday on which we honor his work is given equal treatment.

We respectfully request that Martin Luther King Jr. Day be treated by the UVA Health System in the same way as are all of the other holidays that are recognized by the UVA academic calendar as holidays.

Susan Kools, PhD, RN, FAAN
Madge M. Jones Professor in Nursing
Associate Dean for Diversity & Inclusion
University of Virginia School of Nursing

Gregory C. Townsend, M.D.
Associate Professor of Medicine
Associate Dean for Diversity and Medical Education
University of Virginia School of Medicine