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To:

The Office of Graduate Medical Education, Keck School of Medicine

The Residency Office, USC Department of Emergency Medicine

The Office of the Dean of the Keck School of Medicine

The Executive Leadership of the Keck School of Medicine

The Keck School of Medicine Faculty Council

The Office of the President of the University of Southern California

The Office of the Provost of the University of Southern California

The University of Southern California Human Resources Division

The Department of Health Services of Los Angeles County

We, the Resident Physicians of the University of Southern California Department of Emergency Medicine are writing in concern of our Department Chair Dr. Sean Henderson who has created an unstable academic environment damaging to our education and detrimental to our clinical training as young physicians in this historic institution. This statement is based on his evident disregard for Resident academics, educational faculty, and clinical training. He has repeatedly acted in an impulsive and emotional manner when making Departmental decisions of great consequence to our education, including the disbandment of academic divisions, the dismissal of a fellowship and the marginalization of faculty dedicated to our clinical training. This negative personality of leadership has led to a mass exodus of faculty and a widespread unstable academic environment where decisions of great importance are made during his not-infrequent episodes of public anger, intimidation, and workplace disruption. We are imploring the office of Graduate Medical Education, the University of Southern California and its Keck School of Medicine Leadership, and the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services to take this letter into consideration with absolute gravity.

During this time of recent abrupt and destructive changes to our Department, there has been little to no communication from Dr. Henderson to the Residency, and it is our great concern that he has minimal regard for our unique position as doctors-in-training or the long term educational status of our well-respected program. Two recent significant instances are described below:

One such involves Dr. Henderson's spontaneous and disruptive attempt to dissolve the Division of Pediatric Emergency Medicine on Friday, April 26th 2013 and the public demotion of Dr. Maureen McCollough, Director of the Division of Pediatric Emergency Medicine during her clinical duty hours in front of pediatric patients, their families, residents,

and staff. This action was met with unanimous protest by division faculty as the announcement was made impulsively without prior discussion at a faculty-wide meeting or with the division itself or the Residency beforehand. Dr. Henderson acted in a manner of great disrespect and disruption to the surrounding patients and their families by screaming at and publicly intimidating Dr. McCollough, their physician, in an angry outburst in full view of patients receiving care in the clinical areas of the LAC+USC Hospital Emergency Department. Our pediatric education is centered around this division, and without such outstanding educators and patient advocates in a division dedicated to Pediatrics, a dangerous dearth in our knowledge and experience would ensue.

Another instance involves Dr. Henderson's unilateral and abrupt dissolution of the Division of International Emergency Medicine and its associated fellowship position, along with the demotion of its Director Dr. William Mallon. This announcement was made to Dr. Mallon immediately after a faculty-wide meeting where the topic was never discussed with departmental faculty as a whole, the involved division staff, or the Residency beforehand. The sudden disbandment of the division directly compromises Residents and faculty involved in global health endeavors and disbands a valued fellowship position in International Emergency Medicine. Additionally, we see this as a backwards strategy of decreasing the international involvement of the University of Southern California in a time when cutting-edge academic institutions across the country are embracing global health efforts wholeheartedly. As Residents, we are concerned that this was carried out merely to force a resignation from Dr. Mallon, a devoted supporter of Residents and mentor for junior faculty, a leader in patient and healthcare advocacy, and a central historic educator in our Department. But even more disturbing is the possibility that this action and desired forced resignation was carried out without concern for the collateral damage to a division dedicated to global health, our current collaborative sites abroad, and our own educational opportunities as Residents.

The above-cited specific examples are just a few instances in a litany of disruptive, unilateral actions from Dr. Henderson that have directly affected Resident education and the academic stability of faculty and Residents. We cannot overemphasize how unstable, and insecure it has been to have academic divisions, fellowships, and careers wiped away in such an irresponsible and disrespectful manner with no discussed leadership strategy or logical plan by our Chair before or after his impulsive decision making process. Our greatly valued public institution has become a place where Dr. Henderson can walk into a clinical area at any time in full view of suffering patients to scream and publicly humiliate and demote a faculty member without repercussions, acting with the authoritarian belief and entitlement to do so. This does not take into consideration the countless times that he has disrupted direct patient care to publicly disparage and intimidate faculty members, hospital staff, and Residents. It is of great concern that Dr. Henderson may not understand the gravity of his position or act in a manner of an individual accepting of such responsibility.

The Los Angeles County Department of Health Services Code of Conduct *“provides guidance to all workforce members on general legal and ethical conduct standards to follow.”* As two of the missions of the Department, the Code aims to *“establish a culture where leaders set an ethical example encouraging everyone in the organization to voice concerns when they arise and participate in the resolution of these concerns, if appropriate”* and to *“treat all individuals fairly, with respect and honesty, and as valuable participants in improving the health of communities.”* In addition, the Code’s “Disruptive Behavior” section states:

*“All workforce members should be treated with respect and dignity, and as valuable members of the health care team. Disrespectful or disruptive behavior is not acceptable.*

*Disruptive behavior includes any behavior that interferes with communication, teamwork, or safe patient care. Disruptive behavior can be obvious, for example, verbal outbursts of anger, throwing objects, or disrespectful language.”*

Dr. Henderson has carried out a leadership strife with intimidation and “disruptive behavior” with a lack of regard for post-graduate Resident education and the faculty environment of the Department of Emergency Medicine. His behavior damages the high principles and integrity of the Department of Health Services Code of Conduct, as well as the official written Role and Mission of the University of Southern California and its Code of Ethics.

Our utmost interests are patient care, our own education, and to maintain the reputation and respect of LAC+USC Hospital, the Department of Emergency Medicine, the University of Southern California and the Keck School of Medicine, and we see Dr. Henderson’s actions as directly damaging to our training and to the principles of these greatly valued institutions of ours. Furthermore, the world of academic Emergency Medicine is heavily intertwined with these sub-specialties such as Pediatrics and International Emergency Medicine, and their dismissal in our Department and the consequential exodus of marginalized clinical faculty weakens our breadth of training and ability to pursue academic fellowships and faculty appointments upon graduation.

Residency is a once in a lifetime opportunity to lay the groundwork for the type of physician we as young doctors will become. We chose LAC+USC because of the community it serves, its academic enthusiasm and to learn under the dedicated clinical faculty that chose to work and care for our unique and wonderful patient population. These physician faculty we aspire to emulate hold principles of patient care, Resident education, and social justice as high as clinical acumen and evidence based medicine. We feel these values of LAC+USC Hospital and the doctors and nurses that work at our public institution are being flagrantly disregarded and disrespected by Dr. Henderson through actions such as those described in this letter.

At this point it must also be emphasized that our discontent with our Departmental leadership makes no statement of implication on our Residency Leadership including our program director, assistant program directors, and all associated clinical faculty. Our Residency continues to carry the strength we hold dear in large part due to the tremendous efforts of our Program Director Dr. Jan Shoenberger and our entire Residency faculty. We remain extremely grateful to have their guidance, leadership, and support during this time of heavily decreased morale and marginalization of our education.

We understand that a communication such as this has no binding power, thus we entreat the Public and University institutions addressed to move forward and collect more information on the destructive and disruptive events described in this letter, along with scores of others throughout the past and recent years involving Dr. Henderson. As a justified course of action, we would suggest the following:

1. Exit Interviews of all Departmental faculty that have resigned in the past 2-3 years
2. Individual Confidential Interviews of all current Departmental Faculty
3. Individual Confidential Interviews of all current and recently graduated Residents
4. A review of past reported behaviors of our Chair Dr. Henderson

We feel that this strategy would achieve an honest and fair inquiry into events transpiring in our Department and give us adequate protections to speak in truth without fear of intimidation or retaliation. Additionally, the above efforts would be a reinforcing demonstration that the University of Southern California and the Keck School of Medicine stand by their Code of Ethics and Role and Mission statement, holding education and the respect and safety of its educators and students as an absolute protected priority in its institutions of learning.

As Residents we appreciate the diversity of opinions and views on this issue within our department, in what has become the topic of prime distraction these days. We understand that not everyone in our Residency may agree completely with all of the contents of this letter, and we fearfully expect retaliation from our Chair in the form of removal of Resident resources and academic support, or even outright punishment and intimidation. However, after several Residency-wide meetings, countless conversations among each other, and the composition of this letter through the conceptual contribution of a critical mass of Residents from each class, it is clear that an overwhelming proportion of individuals agree with the facts and threatened principles addressed here.

To protect the persons who support this document from assured intimidation and retaliation from Dr. Henderson, we sign this document in solidarity and anonymity.

With great concern,

The Resident Physicians of the USC Department of Emergency Medicine