

July 26, 2017

Dear members of the USC community,

We have faced many questions in recent days and some troubling media coverage that has raised issues about how we are handling the matter with our former medical school dean, Dr. Carmen Puliafito.

Foremost, I want you to know how saddened and upset I am about recent events in our university community. It is my responsibility to ensure the trust and well-being of our Trojan Family, and I take that responsibility very seriously. I feel badly for all the people directly impacted by this situation. And I feel badly for all the faculty, staff, students, alumni, parents, friends, and supporters of this great university who work tirelessly every day to advance knowledge, educate students, care for patients, and serve the community. As we move forward, their safety and best interests guide my actions.

In my more than 26 years at USC, I have always known the bedrock of this institution is the people with deep integrity who are focused on doing the right thing for our university. I can assure you that I have every confidence we acted in good faith and in accordance with our core values, and we will continue to do so. We are taking this matter very seriously. While we are processing our feelings, whether that is regret, outrage, disgust, or sympathy, I want to make clear that the unfortunate actions of one individual in no way reflect the broader actions of the university and our thousands of faculty members and employees.

That said, we could have done better. In facing other crises, we always found opportunities to learn and ways to improve, and then emerged stronger. Dr. Puliafito's situation is extraordinarily complex, but we should assume we could have done better to recognize the signs and severity of his issues.

We all are eager for answers. As you know, Gibson Dunn is helping us in all aspects of this matter and just began an internal review. We need to let that review run its proper course.

In the meantime, we must immediately begin the process of figuring out what we can do better. The university has well defined policies and procedures to take in reports, conduct investigations, and address and mitigate instances of wrongdoing in the workplace by employees, whether it be reports of sexual harassment, protected class discrimination, embezzlement, or violation of NCAA rules, among other issues.

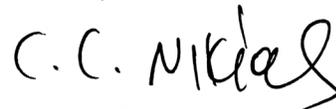
However, as a result of this recent incident, it is clear to us now that the university currently has only loosely defined procedures and guidelines for dealing with employee behavior outside the workplace that may be improper or illegal and has the capacity to affect USC. And, presently, the university has very limited capacity to conduct investigations and follow up on leads or anonymous reports of such employee behavior.

Accordingly, I am charging Provost Michael Quick and Todd Dickey, our senior vice president for administration, to form a task force to address some of the questions that surfaced in the wake of this situation: How do we improve our flow of information across separate parts of our complex organization? What additional training should be done for faculty and staff on understanding, identifying, and dealing with the mental health challenges that may occur from time to time across our community? What are our opportunities for improving campus wellness, especially in the health professions? How do we make sure that incoming reports of improper actions, even if anonymous or questionable, get passed on to higher officials and to the Compliance Office? How do we get a fuller account of the record of those hired for sensitive positions, and better assess them appropriately on an ongoing basis?

I know that some questions will not be easily addressed: how do we balance individual and privacy rights with the goal of protecting our faculty, students, employees, patients, and the university? To which groups of employees should these more intrusive evaluations apply? As we consider these questions, how do we separate allegations of criminal behavior, which should be reported to the police; problems with addiction that call for compassion while the individual seeks treatment; and improprieties that call for discipline or dismissal? And, how do we keep within the scope of our proper concern to protect patients, students, and co-workers, as well as the university itself?

In sharing these questions with you here, I hope you will consider them thoughtfully. They are tough questions, but the best answers will come with input and feedback from throughout our community. We must move forward with resolve and urgency, and we must move quickly to establish the task force and begin our process of learning from the past. The University of Southern California is a world-class institution, and as we learn from this experience, I am confident we will emerge stronger in our mission now and in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C. L. Nikias". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

C. L. Max Nikias  
President