



July 28, 2017

Dear USC community,

I want to express my gratitude to everyone who has provided feedback and expressed support these past few weeks. It has been a great reminder that regardless of differing viewpoints, there is a collective commitment and dedication to this university. Because of all of you, I have deep confidence in the strength and resilience of USC.

We understand there is frustration that the university has not clearly articulated its response around the former medical school dean's behavior. I share your frustration. We have been working around the clock to try to verify the facts as best as they can be determined.

That process will continue, but in the meantime, I want to tell you what we now know and clear up some misperceptions. I cannot disclose details about some of the issues I will mention due to confidentiality and privacy laws.

Over the course of his nearly 10 years as dean, we received various complaints about Dr. Puliafito's behavior, which were addressed through university personnel procedures; this included disciplinary action and professional development coaching.

In November 2015, Provost Quick put Dr. Puliafito on notice for being disengaged from his leadership duties. On March 11, 2016, two USC employees notified Provost Quick that Dr. Puliafito seemed further removed from his duties and expressed concerns about his behavior.

The Provost consulted with me promptly and, as a result, confronted Dr. Puliafito. He chose to resign his position on March 24, 2016, and was placed on sabbatical leave. It is important to note, at that time, no university leader was aware of any illegal or illicit activities, which would have led to a review of his clinical responsibilities.

In fall 2016, a communications staff member received an unsubstantiated tip about a Pasadena hotel incident. When we approached Dr. Puliafito about the incident, he stated a friend's daughter had overdosed at a Pasadena hotel and he had accompanied her to the hospital.

In March 2017 – a year after Dr. Puliafito's resignation – the administration received from the *Los Angeles Times* detailed questions about, and a copy of a 911 recording from the Pasadena hotel incident. This recording was immediately referred to the Hospital Medical Staff, which is an independent body tasked with assessing clinical competency. That body determined that there were no existing patient care complaints and no known clinical issues. The week of July 17, 2017, the Hospital Medical Staff reopened its investigation, and the California State Medical Board initiated a review based on the allegations reported by the *Los Angeles Times*.

Only after the story appeared on July 17, 2017, did we learn that two receptionists in the president's office received a call in March 2016 from a blocked number. The caller, who insisted on anonymity, raised concerns about an incident in a Pasadena hotel involving Dr. Puliafito. Neither receptionist found the claims or the caller credible, and so the information was not elevated and did not reach a senior administrator. Needless to say, we have already put into place a new system that documents and records all incoming calls to the president's office.

After being presented with first-hand evidence of Dr. Puliafito's egregious behavior later that week, the university immediately suspended him from all USC activities related to his faculty position (including patient care), and initiated dismissal proceedings to strip him of his tenure.

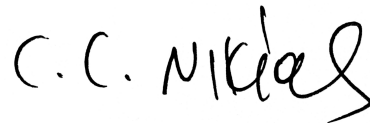
In my view, we acted when we felt we had the information necessary to act, and then we acted decisively.

We now have an internal task force and the external Gibson Dunn team working diligently to get to the bottom of these issues and make recommendations. In the meantime, I ask for your patience to allow the review to run its proper course.

But let me restate and make it abundantly clear. One individual and his actions, in no way, reflect our core values, nor define who we are as a university. It is in moments such as these that the Trojan Family shows its extraordinary strength, and it is in moments such as these that our community comes together, united in perseverance.

This is the spirit on which we draw now. Working together, we have built a world class university, one that educates outstanding students from all walks of life, one that advances consequential work throughout the world, and one that boasts a network of alumni and friends that touches every corner of the planet. In exceptional ways, our research transforms lives, our scholarship advances thought, and our creative work inspires humanity. We uplift communities with our public service, and better lives with our healthcare services and our commitment to civic growth. It is our unshakable optimism—even in the midst of tremendous challenges—that will continue to guide us as we move forward. Fight On!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. L. Nikias", with a stylized flourish at the end.

C. L. Max Nikias  
President