

Department of Ophthalmology

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Dear Members of the Heed Ophthalmic Foundation Selection Committee,

It is with great enthusiasm that I nominate Dr. Margarita Labkovich for the 20th Annual Heed Ophthalmic Foundation Residents Retreat. Dr. Labkovich is a rising PGY-4 resident at the Manhattan Eye, Ear, and Throat Hospital/Northwell, and she is among the most academically driven and intellectually versatile residents I have had the privilege of training. Her commitment to a career in academic ophthalmology is not aspirational—it is already evident in everything she does.

Dr. Labkovich brings an exceptionally broad and rigorous research background. She has authored or co-authored 10 peer-reviewed publications spanning anterior segment disease, oculoplastics, virtual reality-based vision screening, artificial intelligence in retinal care, and health disparities—a remarkable breadth for a resident still in training. Her scientific productivity began well before ophthalmology: she conducted years of neurobiological bench research at the doctoral level, studying amygdala-prefrontal circuitry using optogenetics and viral tracing, work that eventually contributed to a publication in *Neuron*. This foundation gave her a rigorous scientific mindset that now enriches her clinical research. During residency, she has continued to publish first-author clinical studies, including a pilot clinical trial on virtual reality hemifield measurements for ptosis surgery eligibility published in *Translational Vision Science & Technology*, and a comprehensive systematic review on portable ophthalmic technologies for health disparity settings, published in *SAGE Digital Health*.

Dr. Labkovich is a rare physician-innovator. As a medical student, she co-founded Retina Technologies, a virtual reality startup designed to deliver comprehensive, portable vision screening in global health settings. She served as Head of Clinical Validation and ran two successful pilot trials with the device. She holds two filed patents related to this platform. Her entrepreneurial work was recognized with the Global Ophthalmology Summit Innovation Award in 2024, and she has since received research grants from the Manhattan Eye, Ear, and Throat Hospital Alumni Foundation and Young MD Connect. These are not the activities of a resident who occasionally dabbles in research—they are the work of someone who has already begun to function as an academic.

What distinguishes Dr. Labkovich further is the depth and seriousness with which she has pursued global health and health systems scholarship. She was selected as a Schwarzman Scholar at Tsinghua University, earning a Master's degree in Global Affairs with a concentration in global health—a highly competitive program that places its graduates among the next generation of global leaders. Her thesis, conducted in collaboration with the World Economic Forum, examined China's

transition to value-based healthcare. Before and during residency, she participated in ophthalmology mission work in Spain and at the US-Mexico border, not as a tourist but as an organizer and clinical contributor. She understands that access to vision care is a systems problem as much as a clinical one, and she is uniquely equipped to address it at scale.

Dr. Labkovich's commitment to education is equally impressive. **She was selected as Educational Chief for our program, a role reflecting both her peers' trust and the program leadership's confidence in her organizational and mentoring abilities.** In this role, she has contributed to wetlab curriculum development and surgical skills training for junior residents. She led the Ophthalmology Interest Group at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai during medical school, organizing career seminars and connecting students to shadowing and research opportunities. Teaching and mentorship are not incidental to her career plan—they are central to it.

Clinically, Dr. Labkovich is an outstanding resident. **She is thorough, thoughtful, and technically skilled.** She approaches patients with genuine compassion and prepares meticulously for complex cases. Her attendings consistently remark on her calm under pressure and her ability to anticipate and manage challenging situations in both the clinic and the operating room. She is well-regarded by her co-residents and exemplifies the professionalism and collegiality we hope to foster in academic medicine.

The Heed Ophthalmic Foundation Residents Retreat was created precisely for residents like Dr. Labkovich—those who have the talent, intellectual drive, and genuine commitment to pursue academic careers. She will benefit enormously from the mentorship of faculty who have navigated the trainee-to-academician transition, and I am equally certain that she will contribute meaningfully to the discussions. She is the kind of resident who makes every room better.

I recommend Dr. Margarita Labkovich with my highest and most enthusiastic endorsement. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,



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