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The Heed Ophthalmic Foundation

Dear Trustees of the Society of Heed Fellows,

It is with the strongest enthusiasm that I write to support the nomination of Dr. Liz Ciociola Kelly, a third-year ophthalmology resident at the Wilmer Eye Institute, to attend the Heed resident retreat. The retreat's mission, to encourage residents pursuing careers in academic ophthalmology and vision research, is perfectly reflected in Dr. Kelly's outstanding record of achievement, dedication, and promise.

From the beginning of her residency, Dr. Kelly has demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to research and to the pursuit of a career in academic ophthalmology. Her research efforts highlight her remarkable persistence, rigor, and passion for science. She's conducted a project identifying important retinal degenerative morphologic changes and decreased functional outcomes among glaucoma patients undergoing internal limiting membrane/epiretinal membrane removal surgery, a finding with substantial implications for surgical decision-making and patient counseling. The scope of this project and her involvement is remarkable: she was personally responsible for 90% of the hands-on work, devoting more than 180 hours to manually reviewing and analyzing over 800 retinal OCTs, extracting clinical data from charts, and even writing her own statistical code to complete the analysis. It is rare for a resident to take such complete ownership of a project of this scale and complexity, and the recognition she has already received, including the Vitreoretinal Surgery Foundation Research Award and first place in the longstanding and competitive Wilmer Eye Institute Mitchell Prize resident research competition, speaks to the high impact of her work. That she carried out this research during one of the busiest clinical years of her residency is further testament to her resilience, time management, and unwavering dedication.

Dr. Kelly's dedication to research has been longstanding and consistent throughout her training. She already has 22 peer-reviewed publications to her name, including first- and second-author works in top-tier journals such as *Ophthalmology*, *American Journal of Ophthalmology*, *Retina*, *Ophthalmology Retina*, and *Ophthalmology Glaucoma among others*. She has also shared her work through podium and poster presentations at major meetings including ARVO, AAO, and the American Glaucoma Society. Her research experience is both broad and deep: she has conducted prospective cohort studies at the Aravind Eye Institute on global health, sustainability, and the genetics of glaucoma, as well as large database studies exploring clinical ophthalmology outcomes in glaucoma and retina. This breadth highlights her versatility as an investigator and underscores her future potential as a leader in academic ophthalmology and vision research.

Beyond her research excellence, Dr. Kelly has consistently distinguished herself as a compassionate, skilled, and dedicated clinician. She is kind, empathetic, and quickly earns the trust of her patients. She approaches clinical care with diligence and attention to detail while remaining efficient, making her both thorough and effective. She goes above and beyond to ensure patients receive the best possible care and has been equally supportive of her co-residents. Her clinical excellence has been recognized through the Iliff-Kress Patient Excellence Award, an honor reserved for one resident per class who exemplifies outstanding patient-centered care. Her potential as a leader and her strong relationships with her coresidents was just recently recognized with her appointment as co-administrative chief resident for the upcoming academic year.



In summary, Dr. Liz Ciociola Kelly is an exceptional candidate for this retreat. She embodies the qualities this retreat was designed to recognize: a steadfast dedication to research, a clear trajectory toward a career in academic ophthalmology, and excellence in patient care. I recommend her with the highest enthusiasm and confidence in her continued success as a clinician-scientist and educator.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter J. McDonnell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Peter J. McDonnell, M.D.