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Israel Englander
Department of Ophthalmology

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Re: Dr. Evguenia (Jane) Ivakhnitskaia

Dear Members of the Heed Ophthalmic Foundation Resident Retreat Selection Committee,

It is my great pleasure to provide my strongest recommendation for Dr. Evguenia (Jane) Ivakhnitskaia, a current PGY-3 resident in ophthalmology, for participation in the upcoming Heed Ophthalmic Foundation Resident Retreat. I have worked closely with Dr. Ivakhnitskaia in clinical, academic, and leadership capacities, including as her Residency Program Director over the past three years. I have followed her development closely and can state without hesitation that she is among the most rigorously trained and academically oriented residents we have trained at Weill Cornell Medicine. She exemplifies the clinician-scientist pathway and is exceptionally well prepared for a career in academic ophthalmology. To this end, she is an exceptional fit for the Heed retreat's mission and would contribute to the event in the best possible ways.

Dr. Ivakhnitskaia's academic foundation reflects a substantial depth and continuity of scientific training, centered on the study of neural plasticity and regeneration across systems and disease contexts. Her research trajectory spans undergraduate work in visual development at Cornell University, post-baccalaureate training at the National Institute of Mental Health as an IRTA fellow, and extensive doctoral training in ophthalmic neuroscience within the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences at the University of Illinois at Chicago. This long-standing commitment to mechanistic science clearly distinguishes her within her cohort.

During her graduate training in the Rosenblatt laboratory, Dr. Ivakhnitskaia pursued a technically demanding and highly original body of work examining the neurotoxic effects of benzalkonium chloride on corneal nerves and the functional consequences of nerve injury and regeneration. She developed expertise in in vivo single-unit trigeminal ganglion electrophysiology, becoming one of a very small number of investigators capable of performing this challenging technique. Her work required not only substantial technical mastery, but also scientific creativity, culminating in multiple peer-reviewed publications in high-quality journals such as *The Ocular Surface* and *Scientific Reports*. Notably, her research was supported by an F30 Ruth L. Kirschstein NRSA from the National Eye Institute, a strong early indicator of her potential for an NIH-funded investigative career.

What is particularly compelling about Dr. Ivakhnitskaia is her ability to integrate this deep neuroscientific expertise with meaningful clinical questions. Her work has consistently focused on understanding how neural injury and repair translate into patient-relevant symptoms and outcomes. This translational mindset now carries forward into her ophthalmology residency, where she approaches clinical medicine with an unusual degree of biological insight, intellectual discipline, and curiosity. Faculty recognize her as a resident who consistently elevates clinical discussions through careful attention to underlying mechanisms and evidence.

Since entering residency, Dr. Ivakhnitskaia has continued to build scholarly momentum, contributing to retina-focused clinical research including a published study in *Retina* examining risk factors for early rhegmatogenous retinal detachment following open globe injury, as well as several ongoing projects addressing macular ischemic syndromes and treatment-related adverse events. These efforts reflect her growing commitment to vitreoretinal disease, an area in which she sees unique opportunities to study neuroprotection and neuroplasticity within the central nervous system. Her decision to pursue vitreoretinal fellowship training is thoughtful, strategic, and clearly aligned with her long-term academic goals.

The opportunity to attend the prestigious Heed Ophthalmic Foundation Resident Retreat is perfectly suited to Dr. Ivakhnitskaia at this stage of her development. Its focus on academic career pathways, mentorship from recent K-awardees, and candid discussion of how faculty integrate patient care with research, education, and leadership mirrors the career she is actively preparing to pursue. I am confident she will be an engaged and insightful participant who both benefits from and meaningfully contributes to discussions on the transition from trainee to academic ophthalmologist.

In addition to her intellectual and scientific strengths, Dr. Ivakhnitskaia possesses the interpersonal qualities essential for success in academic medicine. She is collegial, reflective, and generous as a teacher and collaborator. She is highly respected by her peers and faculty and has already demonstrated the professionalism and leadership potential expected of a future academic faculty member.

In summary, Dr. Ivakhnitskaia is an exceptional resident with a clear and credible trajectory toward a career in academic ophthalmology as a clinician-scientist. Her scientific preparation, scholarly productivity, and commitment to translating discoveries into patient care are outstanding. I give her my strongest possible endorsement for the Heed Ophthalmic Foundation Resident Retreat and are confident that this experience will meaningfully accelerate her development as an academic ophthalmologist.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide additional information: kyg9004@med.cornell.edu

Sincerely,

Kyle J. Godfrey, MD, FACS