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April 28, 2026

Dear Heed Ophthalmic Foundation Residents Retreat Selection Committee,

It is my great pleasure to give my **highest recommendation** to **Dr. Zachary Richards** for the Heed Ophthalmic Foundation Residents Retreat. Dr. Richards is currently a PGY-3 resident, in good standing at the University of Iowa Department of Ophthalmology, anticipating graduation in June of 2027 and entering a **Vitreoretinal Surgery Fellowship**. I have known Zac as his residency program director, as well as his faculty in the pediatric ophthalmology clinic and operating room. His potential to be a strong and impactful academic retina surgeon, educator and innovator is incredibly strong. **Seeing him grow as a resident, as a surgeon and as an engineer-inventor during his residency with us has been one of the most rewarding experiences**, as a program director. Dr. Richards seeks to systematically improve our program and hospital, making education (and the electronic medical record system) easier for everyone. Dr. Richards is incredibly **intelligent, hardworking, thoughtful**, and an **accomplished** person. I believe he will be an exceptional vitreoretinal fellow, surgeon, and academic physician.

Dr. Richards and I have worked together for the past three years. During his residency training, I have had the privilege of being his faculty and mentor, as the Residency Program Director, as well as in the pediatric ophthalmology clinic and operating room. In clinic, Dr. Richards's ability to keep complex information and patient volumes **accurate and organized** is admirable. Our first OR day together on this rotation is later this week, but based on his strong performance as a PGY2 in my OR, I have no concerns about his surgical skill. **His fund of knowledge is incredibly high** – he is able to not only recall facts, but consider them from different perspectives.

It is indeed this unique insight and ability to see problems from a new perspective that is the source of his strength, and will be the impetus for his success as an academic ophthalmologist. His background and **Masters in Interdisciplinary Engineering serves him in the realm of medical device innovation**. His most recent project that we are looking to benefit from, is a 3-D stereoscopic camera mount for ophthalmic microscopes, allowing for capture of Virtual Reality-ready video. This is allowing for (literally and figuratively) a new dimension of surgical education, both 1:1 between the surgeon and resident, and scalable to large audiences across the world. Zac has had the **vision for this, the technical ability, and the fortitude** to see it to fruition.

His accomplishments as a medical device innovator have extended to work with slit lamp microscopes adapted for patients of different body habitus and printable biomaterial for craniofacial skeletal defect implants. It is no surprise that he was selected as an **Innovation**

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Leadership Fellow at the University of Iowa – **a significant honor**, and a first for our ophthalmology residents.

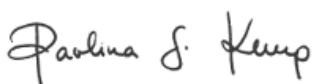
Dr. Richards has thoroughly impressed many faculty at the University of Iowa. Allow me to share just a few **excerpts from his evaluations** that demonstrate his **stellar performance**:

- “Dr. Richards did an outstanding job on his oculoplastics rotation. He really had to step up with the new fellow starting at the same time, and he took on the challenge well. He isn't going into oculoplastic surgery and yet he really seemed to want to learn as much as possible on the rotation, was **willing and able to help out** with a large inpatient load at that time of year, and he mentored our new fellow beautifully. I really appreciated his analytical style and his thoughtful questions.”
- “**A gentleman and a scholar**, Dr. Richards holds down the fort, and I always trust he will handle what he can and reach out when he reaches his limits in a way that we will keep the patient safe.”
- “Zac was incredible on call and has a **tremendous amount of knowledge and critically thinks about his approach** towards a complex workup of every patient situation he encounters.”

In summary, I give **Dr. Zac Richards my highest recommendation** for the Heed Ophthalmic Foundation Residents Retreat. His ability to think outside the box, and fix what is needed in a thoughtful way is a treasure. The academic mentorship and coaching in research and the academic world that the Heed Foundation could provide would be incredibly impactful. With your help, what he will accomplish is very powerful.

Should we be so lucky to have both our nominees selected, we would be happy to fund a second resident to attend. Please do not hesitate to call, text, or email me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



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