USC Roski Eye Institute
Keck Medicine of USC

April 27, 2026

Re: Heed Resident Retreat Nominee – Rahul Dhodapkar, MD (PGY3)

Dear Heed Ophthalmic Foundation Selections Committee:

It is with the utmost enthusiasm that we (JMH and BJS) write in strong support of **Dr. Rahul Dhodapkar**, an outstanding PGY-3 ophthalmology resident at the Keck School of Medicine of USC and Los Angeles General Medical Center, for selection to attend the Annual Heed Foundation Resident Retreat. Rahul is an exceptional physician-scientist whose intellectual rigor, creativity, and dedication to advancing vision science make him an ideal candidate for this honor.

Rahul brings a unique and decorated background to ophthalmology. Prior to medical school, he trained as a computer scientist at Yale and worked as an engineer at MongoDB, where he architected large-scale information systems for Fortune 500 clients. He has since harnessed this technical expertise to address fundamental questions in ophthalmic research. His work at Yale and now at USC has spanned cutting-edge areas including **single-cell transcriptomics, deep learning for ophthalmic imaging, and the role of glial and immune mechanisms in retinal disease**. This interdisciplinary fluency has already yielded an impressive body of work—Rahul has authored over 20 peer-reviewed publications, including in *Nature*, *Nature Methods*, *Nature Communications*, *Scientific Reports*, and *Ophthalmology Science*.

Equally striking is his ability to generate high-impact ideas that bridge basic science and clinical relevance. For example, his **cross-species single-cell analysis of Müller glia** has illuminated pathways that may unlock regenerative therapies for blinding diseases. More recently, Rahul has served as co-investigator on a **$100,000 Colton Center for Autoimmunity grant**, leveraging artificial intelligence–driven "in silico humans" to discover new therapeutic targets for age-related macular degeneration. His record demonstrates not only technical mastery but also the vision to ask questions that matter for patients.

Rahul has also distinguished himself as a collaborative leader and mentor at every step of his young career. At Yale, he guided undergraduate and postgraduate trainees in advanced laboratory techniques and analytic approaches. His calm demeanor, humility, and commitment to service—including leadership roles at the HAVEN Free Clinic—underscore his character as a compassionate physician dedicated to both patients and colleagues. At USC, he contributes generously to the academic environment, fostering a culture of intellectual curiosity among his peers. As such, he has been selected to be one of two administrative chief residents for the 2026-2027 academic year.

His ultimate career goal is to leverage his background in computer science and medicine to build a career as a physician-scientist applying computational approaches and machine learning to better characterize glaucomatous optic neuropathy, predict disease progression, and identify new therapeutic targets.

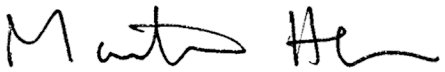
The Heed Resident Retreat seeks to encourage the future leaders of academic ophthalmology - Rahul embodies

precisely this trajectory: he is already making original, field-shaping contributions and has the drive, creativity, and integrity to become a leading innovator in vision science. Most recently, he was honored as one of only four trainees to present his work in developing automated methods for strabismus evaluation in collaboration with our pediatric ophthalmology faculty at the **2026 AUPO/RPB Resident and Fellow Research Forum** – just the beginning of what we fully expect will be a very productive career in academic ophthalmology.

We give Dr. Dhodapkar our strongest possible recommendation for this opportunity – **he is quite possibly the best and most prolific resident I (BJS) have worked with in my career**. He has our full support to attend the 2026 Heed Foundation Resident Retreat and the department is happy to fund two residents to attend should they both be selected. Thank you for your kind consideration of this utterly outstanding candidate.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to either of us should you have any questions (brian.song@med.usc.edu or heur@med.usc.edu). Rahul has waived his right to review this letter.

Sincerely,



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