Trojan Legacy Circle  
May 2019  
Laura Mosqueda Remarks  

Welcome and thank you. Thank you for staying engaged with this great university and for your commitment and support through the Trojan Legacy Circle.

I’m a geriatrician and have spent a lot of time with people in their 60’s and beyond. In fact, the oldest person I met was 106! A while ago I asked a group of my patients who were over the age of 85 to write down some good things and some bad things about growing old. On the negative side, they commented on the amount of time they spent in doctors’ offices, bemoaned that they needed some help with shopping and getting around town, and mentioned some specific issues like gardening out the window and “saggage”. On the positive side, they described deeper friendships, feeling less competitive and more reflective/spiritual. One person wrote “my kids see me as more than a pancake maker now”.

In fact, there are studies that show happiness as a U shaped curve when looked at during our adult years. We tend to be happiest when we’re young adults and when we’re in our 70s and 80s. That’s good because more of us are living longer than ever before. In fact, half of the people who have lived to be over 65 in the history of planet Earth are alive today. While it took 10,000 years for life expectancy to double from 20 to 40, it then only took 100 years for life expectancy to double again to 80, from 1900 to 2000. 10,000 people in the United States turn 65 every day and people over 85 are the fastest growing segment of our population.

Yet, we don’t tend to view older adults as a treasured resource. Instead we often devalue older adults.  
- This can be seen in the doctor’s office when a physician looks past the older adult patient and instead addresses a family member.  
- It can be seen in the wildly successful (in terms of $) anti-aging movement.  
- It can be seen in the phrase “silver tsunami” which implies a destructive force to be feared  
- It can be heard when people talk about “the problem of our aging society”  
- It is all around us in the media  

But this ageism is a strange phenomenon. It’s a prejudice against our future selves. It makes no sense.

There’s no doubt that tough issues are more likely to arise as we get older. I’m proud to say that my colleagues at the Keck School of Medicine and at the University as a whole are doing important work to mitigate many of these issues across the lifespan.  
- We have one of the top neuroscience groups in the world, working from the molecular level to the societal level to understand, prevent, and cure Alzheimer’s Disease and other neurodegenerative diseases such as Parkinson’s Disease and Multiple Sclerosis  
- In collaboration with the Viterbi School of Engineering we are helping people who are blind to see again and people who are deaf to hear again  
- In collaboration with the Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work we are ferreting out the causes of homelessness and providing medical care to people in shelters on skid row
• In collaboration with the School of Architecture we are studying the effects of indoor natural light on the mood of people who live in nursing homes
• In collaboration with our colleagues in Occupational Therapy we are examining better ways to care for people with autism
• In collaboration with the Leonard Davis School of Gerontology we are studying the causes and consequences of elder abuse and neglect
• In collaboration with the School of Dramatic Arts we are studying the role of medical clowning in easing the suffering of people with cancer
• … And the list goes on.

Everything we’re doing here at USC is focused on making the world a better place, today and for the future.

So when we think about the Trojan legacy circle it has deep meaning and extraordinary potential to help countless people. At its most basic, the word “legacy” is the amount of money or property left to someone in a will. But legacy is so much more than that. Legacy is fundamental to having meaning, being human, and leaving a permanent mark of good on the world.

Thinking about our legacy makes us reflect on what’s truly important in our lives:
• What people and causes are most important to me?
• What issues and problems have impacted my life?
• How should I share my good fortune and prosperity with others?
• How might I pass on what I’ve learned, encouraging others to take the baton and keep running?

Because a legacy isn’t just about money. There is the legacy that a great leader leaves behind (like Jack Welch at GE and his concept of a “boundaryless company”). There are emotional and spiritual legacies left by people who have been important to the world (like Martin Luther King, Jr.) or important to a small circle of family and friends (like a mother). A legacy, be it financial, spiritual, or emotional, is a way to be immortal. It allows what is near and dear to us to live on in others.

But it’s not called the Trojan Legacy society or the Trojan legacy program or the Trojan legacy group. It’s called the Trojan Legacy Circle. A circle represents the cyclical nature of life, and the passage of time. In many cultures it is seen as a divine, sacred symbol. It represents notions of totality, wholeness, perfection, infinity.

There is plenty of evidence showing that staying engaged and having meaning helps people age well. By doing good for others we do good for ourselves.

And at the Keck School of Medicine we are laser focused on curing disease, caring for those who are afflicted, and preventing illness from occurring in the first place. We strive for excellence and innovation grounded in collaboration, trust, respect, and integrity. At our school we have 2100 faculty and 2000 staff training, 750 medical students, 930 residents and fellows, and 1,200 masters and PhD students.
Times have changed. When my mother graduated from medical school at USC in 1954 she was 1 of 4 women in a class of 60. When I graduated from medical school at USC in 1987, a third of my class were women. For the entering class of medical students who will graduate in 2022, 52% are women, 21% are underrepresented minorities and 16% are 1st generation college students.

Our school of medicine has been groundbreaking from its beginning in 1885: We were the first to include “Introduction to Clinical Medicine” in the curriculum - thus providing our students with clinical exposure to patients from the moment they enter our doors. This is now standard practice across the country. We have programs that allow students to pursue an extra year of research, or to get a dual masters degree in business or public health, or spend several extra years in our MD/PhD program. We also have programs that focus on the arts and humanities to foster imagination, curiosity, empathy, and critical reflection. This is accomplished through various experiences including a speaker series, art gallery, music society, drawing classes, and narrative medicine. We are at the forefront of the nation in developing a holistic, robust wellness program to address mental health among students and develop a more compassionate, emotionally aware learning environment.

In the recent past, we have been pursuing strategic initiatives aimed at transforming the Keck School of Medicine into one of the most highly regarded medical schools in the nation. This involves a major commitment to funding innovative research programs which of course requires space and state-of-the-art laboratory equipment in addition to the best and brightest scientists in the world. Whether it’s a cyclotron that generates particles needed for sophisticated neuroimaging, a cGMP facility that will transform a patients’ own T cells into cells that attack the cancer in their body, or a cryo- electron microscope to study the structures of biological molecules, we will continue to utilize technology and lead the way in solving some of the greatest health problems that face mankind today.

The Keck School is capitalizing on the momentum generated by the success of our seven-year accreditation by the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME). This has given us the breathing room to launch what we call “The Keck Next Curriculum Renewal Initiative”. This initiative involves an in-depth review of our instructional design, educational technology, video production, and strategic planning as well as faculty development, and will be ready for implementation in 2021. And, again, as is true with increasing our research capacity, a leap forward in medical education will also require more space with better technology. The renewal effort is framed by an ethos of Social Justice and we look forward to distinguishing the Keck School as an environment in which medical students become uniquely qualified and experienced in recognizing and effectively responding to the social determinants that challenge the health of our patients and communities.

We also have several new school-wide initiatives underway.

- Our office of community engagement is focused on building stronger, better, and more meaningful relationships with our community.
- Our Office for Social Justice is focused on fair and equitable access to healthcare and health promotion for all.
• Our center on Gender Equity in Medicine and Science (GEMS) was recently launched and will address issues such as sexual harassment and advance gender equity across the career pipeline.
• Our office on leadership and wellness is offering courses for those who are interested in professional growth, as well as classes for wellness of mind and body.

So I hope this gives you a glimpse into why your support is so important to us. The funds left through a legacy gift will help generations to come, and knowing that you believe in what we are doing, enough to make this commitment, inspires us to keep on doing the hard, important work. Please accept my heartfelt gratitude on behalf of my colleagues at the Keck school and at the University as a whole. As you can probably tell, we are proud of our past, enthusiastic about our present, and excited about our future! Fight on!