The Scope

"Connecting Riverside"
By: Kathryn Lewis, MS2 with Zara Khan, MS2

Dearth Community Connect (DCC) is one of the newest student organizations at the school of medicine. It was founded last year and its mission is to bring awareness to deaf culture and improve the quality of healthcare deaf people receive. Since its foundation, we have hosted two presenters on deaf culture and one ASL workshop for medical students. Zara Khan and I (MS2s) are co-founders of the organization and have different reasons for why we were interested in starting it.

Zara recalls, “The idea to form DCC was entirely Kathryn’s; last year during Block 1, she asked if I would be interested in co-founding the organization. I loved the idea instantly. Prior to medical school, I worked as a behavior interventionist for children with autism for two years. During this time, I learned that ASL was also used to communicate with children with autism that are having difficulty learning and formulating spoken language. While I was not assigned to any that used ASL, I was asked to substitute for one for a session, and I was completely lost. I had no idea what the child wanted to do and when he needed water. I believe that when we are in a position where we are supposed to be helping people get through something, we at least need to be able to communicate with them. I understand the importance of bridging gaps that may exist between communities. Whether it be autism awareness or awareness of deaf culture or learning some ASL, as future physicians, the learning opportunities an organization like DCC provides can only further improve our relationships with our patients.”

I myself have been interested in deaf culture and improving my ASL after I took 4 quarters of it as an undergraduate at UCSD. When I started medical school, I realized that I am in a position to advocate for the deaf community and therefore had the idea to start DCC.

Most recently, DCC held an evening ASL workshop for medical students. Austin Cary, an ASL professor at Cal Baptist and one of the organization’s greatest supporters, taught for the evening. We had a turnout of about 11 students that included MS1s and MS2s. Mr. Cary taught us the alphabet and common signs such as “where do you feel pain?” and “do you have allergies?”.

Reflecting on the workshop, Josh Zozaya (MS2) said, “It almost feels like traveling to a new country because you learn so much about how this specific group of people operates in a world that is perceived differently than what we are used to.”

(“Connecting” continued from opposite)
I am used to.” We hope that other students that attend DCC events and the ASL workshop agree that it is a unique opportunity to navigate a new culture and language. We plan to hold one more workshop before we disappear in the spring for boards - hopefully on a weekend so that MS3s and MS4s that have expressed interest can stop by.

When DCC started, Zara and I had the goals of hosting ASL workshops and forums about deaf culture for students. And as the past year has gone by, we have been excited for the bright future ahead for the organization. Specifically, we hope to someday see a working relationship develop between the School of Medicine and the Riverside School for the Deaf. We are in such a strategic location to build relationships with the surrounding deaf community; it would be a terrible disservice to the Inland Empire to not work together. Additionally, Zara came up with the idea to one day develop a language selective for ASL - just like MedSpa! This is a wonderful idea given that ASL is the third most common language used in this region, following English and Spanish. These are big goals that we both expect will take a longer time to develop than we will be in medical school. However, with future students taking on the organization each year, we anticipate these dreams to be made reality.

At the end of DCC’s first-ever ASL workshop on Nov 9th, Mr. Cary left the students with a quote from deaf actress Marlee Martin: “I hope I inspire people who hear. Hearing people have the ability to remove barriers that prevent deaf people from achieving their dreams.” This quote, and the night of ASL immersion, left Zara and I reflecting on the importance of DCC on the UCR SOM campus. We feel that starting this organization and exposing students to deaf culture and community has been one of the most valuable and meaningful things we have done in medical school thus far. The deaf community is greatly misunderstood, judged, and underserved and we hope to contribute to changing that - starting with our UCR family.—

Students and staff were kind enough to share their answers to this issue’s question: What about UCR School of Medicine are you most thankful for?

“The supportive faculty, mentorship, and guidance in a time of dire need.”
-Calvin Sung, MS3

“The students because you guys are great. I get to meet all different backgrounds, and everyone has the same end goal.”
-Tammy Clawson, Student Affairs Officer

“The curriculum is the thing I’m most thankful for. I think learning in an organ based manner is very systematic. They build upon each other, which is helpful for learning for Step and makes the learning process much more enjoyable.”
-Yazeed Kesbeh, MS2

“The people that work here and how happy and kind they are.”
-Imad Jobah, UCR Sophomore, Front Desk Student Assistant

“The patient population here. It’s a population I’ve served since undergrad and I want to continue serving. UCR can give me that patient population.”
-Anthony Choi, MS4
Over six years ago, I stepped out of my New York apartment in Queens in the pre-dawn hours to see a dark figure sprawled out in the middle of the road, across from the laundromat next door. Just minutes before, I was sound asleep lying on a futon mattress that had become my de facto bed for nearly two years. My room was probably a converted hallway from the carpark to the stairs. It was narrow and had no windows, just a glass paneled door that didn't let me see out onto the street. It was a cool spring night so I had left that door ajar. From the opened door I could only hear the words, “Help me! Help me! Help me...”. I was hoping that I was dreaming, or it was just a kid joking around.

I groggily walked towards the figure. I thought he had been drinking and fallen off the curb onto the street. My cell phone light lit up his bloodied face. He appeared to be a middle-aged Asian man. I couldn't make out much else. My body began to feel chills into my bones as if my blood sugar had bottomed out in that instant. A voice called from the balcony of the apartment upstairs, “I called the ambulance! They should be coming soon.” I had absolutely no idea what to do, except I took off my hoodie to place it against the downhill side of his head to keep it from rolling to the side. I could only piece together that a car had hit him. Then it left the scene.

As the morning light broke, a squad car came first and was followed soon after by fire department first responders. I remembered that the weekend before, there was a city-wide search for another hit-and-run car that killed a young boy, also in Queens. I doubt there was any connection, but I was half-expecting to see a news article in the free New York Metro paper or hear something on the local news about this gentleman. Not a word was said. I'm fairly certain he survived. I've had no confirmation of this. Six years have gone by and I do not believe that I ever really talked to anyone about the incident, much less wrote about it. That morning, I geared up in my cycling gear and rode my bike to work. The daily stressors of life filled up the time and I could only recall the incident if I actively thought about it. The fact that it occurred in the twilight hours and in a half-awoken state makes it feel unreal. When I next saw my upstairs neighbor, I do not believe either of us brought up the incident. And I sometimes question its realness.

You, the reader, might question if my mental health has been affected in some way. Something deep down definitely has been affected otherwise, I would not have remembered it so vividly six years after the fact. You'll simply have to take my assurances that nothing worrisome is underfoot and, starting henceforth, I will be openly discussing this with those whom I trust and love. Don’t wait six years.—

By: Mark Sueyoshi, MS4

“Yon and Mu”: A Book Review

By: Stephanie Dreikorn, MS2

I was in the mood for some light reading so I asked my sister for a recommendation. Knowing my love of cats and all things cat-related, she suggested Yon & Mu, a manga by Junji Ito. I was drawn immediately to its yellow cover with the captivating stares of two cats looking back at me—one menacing (reminding me of my own evil feline friend Sam) and the other quite inviting. I was very much intrigued.

Known as The Godfather of horror manga, Junji Ito brings his characteristic drawings to life in a story about how two cats came into his life, his new home, and eventually his heart. After getting used to its yellow cover with the captivating stances of two cats looking back at me—one menacing (reminding me of my own evil feline friend Sam) and the other quite inviting, I was very much intrigued.

Known as The Godfather of horror manga, Junji Ito brings his characteristic drawings to life in a story about how two cats came into his life, his new home, and eventually his heart. After getting used to reading what seemed like back to front and right to left—Japanese style!—the story picked right up with Ito and his wife talking about ("Book" continues on p4)
being dog or cat people. Surprise, surprise Junji-San, your wife is a cat person! So giving in to the wishes of his new bride, Ito finds that her cat will be moving in. But wait, he’ll get lonely and he needs a friend… So moves in another cat. First into the house though is Yon, a white cat with black spots on his back that resemble a skull. He’s got a skinny face—what the author calls an "accursed" face—what one of my friends would call a "torpedo face." Next is a Norwegian forest cat named Mu— the same vacant stare my sister’s Maine coon has and all the long, fluffy fur as well. Ito is not too happy when these felines take up residence in his new home. Being a horror manga artist, it was interesting how he uses the same suspense he would in a horror story to build tension into a simple story about cats. It was quite a page-turner.

Together, the often cute but hilarious images and dynamic story layout captures many of the emotions we cat lovers may feel about our furry little friends. Love me dammit! I laughed, I didn’t cry, but I felt all the warm and fuzzies that come from reading a book about cats. You’ll have to check it out to find out how this story plays out but let me say: if you love cats, this quick read is worth your while.—

“Pun-ch Line”

Our patient has had a runny nose for three days.

Wow, that’s pretty good cardio for a nose.

“Pun-ch Line” is brought to you by the always thoughtful and never thankless Scott Cramer, MS3 (left) and Elias Fanous, MS3 (right).
Dear readers, fret no more! I, Nostradamus Aldebaran Charmander, come to you once more with the most exigent missive from the heavenly globes yet! Gird yourselves, for the stars have foreseen the circumstances in which we find ourselves at the finale of this solar revolution!

Aquarius: January 20th-February 18th

The Aquarius native may have an excellent month... provided they are capable of maintaining the balance between their amorous and academic lives. Aquarius non-natives will be forced to undergo extensive background checks, fingerprinting, dream journaling, and critical review by a panel of five elders of a heretofore unknown secret society. Even then, non-Aquarius natives are not likely to have an excellent month.

Pisces: February 19th-March 20th

Although you will face challenges this month, Pisces, you are likely to come out a pecuniary and professional winner. Although frankly, the stars and I find it difficult to believe your finances will improve in the face of the crushing debt you still owe to that bookie at the horse races. Perhaps you should make compound interest the first challenge you overcome?

Aries: March 21st-April 19th

Dear Aries, this month, you’re tidying up emotionally to make room for the good things to enter your life. But how will you know they are good? What if the things you think are good end up scratching at your window at night while you sleep? Or scrabble across the bathroom floor while you’re showering? What if they produce inhuman shrieks and gurgles in your attic as neighborhood pets go missing?

Taurus: April 20th-May 20th

There are stellar influences for partnering this month that will bring more pride, charm, warmth, affection, and good humor to your relationships than ever before. You know, it’s funny; as I was receiving this communiqué des étoiles, the Pleiades kept winking at me. At the time, I thought they had something in their eye, but now I’m wondering if they were saying they had a thing for you. If you’re ever near RA 3h 47m 24s | Dec +24° 7’ 0”, you may consider dropping by ;)

Gemini: May 21st-June 20th

When the stars indicated that work, attention to detail, routines, and health are all well-favored in December, I was like “Duh, obviously. You know I’m writing this for a medical school, right?” But the stars didn’t hear me, for their attention had already shifted to cat videos.

Cancer: June 21st-July 22nd

Dear Cancerian, all month, you have Mars in your ("Scopes" continues on p6)
family and home -- a transit that can work on different levels, but not on the level of your personal space. Its time you asked Mars to pay rent or get out. Remind Mars gently that it's called a transit for a reason and encourage it to move on. With luck, it will return to its natural habitat without law enforcement intervention. *In bocca al lupo!*

**Leo:** July 23rd-August 22nd

December's emphasis on your solar fourth house will play out on a personal, internal level, allowing you to see yourself, your inner needs, and desires more honestly now. But when you realize you are not Dorian Gray, but his portrait, remember this: a Jupiter-Neptune transit will bring beautiful energy to your intimate life in August 2018.

**Virgo:** August 23rd-September 22nd

Your desire to show a different side of yourself is sure of success this month. You have the right intention, energy and approach to make sure no-one doubts you are a changed person. Focus on the positive, beautiful, and magical qualities of life and love. Well, that’s all the advice the stars have for your parole hearing! *Behatzi'lahah!*

**Libra:** September 23rd-October 22nd

This month, you may feel that you attract gifts, recognition for your work, bonuses, or pay raises. You may be enjoying a feeling of abundance or a stronger drive to enjoy the fruits of your labor. I can’t explain now, but DO NOT believe these feelings. Meet me in the alley after dark. The world may hang in the balance.

**Scorpio:** October 23rd-November 21st

At start of December, a dilemma will arise involving wealth, resources, and self-respect in conflict with your need for recreation, romance, or creative pursuits. This will balloon into an existential crisis that will persist through the month, the year, and perhaps, the rest of your life. Fortunately, you will find it more comfortable than usual to pour yourself into your work, which you should do to distract from the crushing anxiety caused by your inability to reconcile your professional and personal life.

**Sagittarius:** November 22nd-December 21st

You have the reputation of telling a thing how it is, with little regard for the wider consequences. However, this glosses over the unstoppable mental dynamo that grows behind your guileless exterior. Has anyone ever commented on that growling? When did the growling start? Does anyone else in your family have an unstoppable mental dynamo that grows behind their guileless exterior?

**Capricorn:** December 22nd-January 19th

Long distance runners talk about a point called ‘the wall’, which is the utter exhaustion at the ¾ mark in a marathon. Another time they talk about hitting a wall is when their bodies actually slam into a wall because they weren’t looking where they’re going. Yet another time is when they talk about the 1979 album by Pink Floyd. Do you see the connection? That’s your December.—

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**“Vaccine Policy”**

**By: Christopher Lis, Brother to the Editor in Chief**

An increasing number of people are infected with measles, mumps, and pertussis. These illnesses can be avoided at low-cost through vaccinations. Thus, prospective policies should focus on increasing the number of individuals vaccinated. The United States has historically advocated for some form of state involvement with regards to vaccines; the overriding theme being that individual states can exert significant influence. However, states vary greatly in allowance for exemption from vaccines.

One approach would view this as the primary concern that should be addressed, as states with more stringent exemption laws, such as Mississippi and West Virginia boast the highest immunization rates in the country. That approach would eliminate nonmedical exemptions (NMEs). Another approach would incentivize healthcare providers to use libertarian-paternalistic behavioral techniques to achieve better immunization results. Both alternatives are empirically verified and are evaluated with regards to effectiveness, liberty, efficiency, social feasibility, political feasibility, and administrative feasibility.

However, they are not equal. Rescinding NMEs at the federal level may be effective, but would face great social, political, and administrative restraints. It is moderately effective with regards to achieving its goal of reducing cases of pertussis, but would likely not affect measles or mumps significantly. It ranks low on the liberty criterion, as restricting exemptions for all states, regardless of their current respective policies, would shrink freedom.

The libertarian paternalist approach is theoretical; analysis of its application to vaccination is limited. It involves using behavioral psychology and economic techniques (nudges) to help people overcome cognitive biases and achieve public policy goals. Such techniques include using opt-out framing (“We are going to conduct X shots today”) rather than opt-in/participatory language (“What would you like to do about shots today?”) When combining a variety of research including the influence of transaction costs, (*“Vaccine” continues on p8*)
On October 18-19, UCR School of Medicine was host to Paula Braveman, MD, MPH, a Family and Community Medicine professor and Director of the Center on Social Disparities in Health at UC San Francisco. Dr. Braveman is a leading authority on identifying and measuring class status and racism and their impacts on health. She has worked with policy and health leaders in the United States and internationally to translate rigorous research to practice, including through the National Academy of Medicine, World Health Organization, and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Dr. Braveman imparted insights from her more than 30-year career at two lunchtime discussions for medical students and a public lecture that filled the seats of G650.

In her sweeping lecture, she reviewed the literature and conceptual models that illuminate the health implications of disparate access to education, employment, and housing – moving upstream from the walls of the clinic and hospital. She highlighted the legacies of racism and the growing economic gap between rich and poor in the US. To effectively confront persistent disparities in health, Dr. Braveman affirms, intervention must target the level of economic and social opportunity. This entails reducing poverty, eliminating segregation, economic development in disadvantaged communities, child and youth development, and job creation and training. Dr. Braveman encouraged medical students, “You’re going to be there to be an advocate and tell moving stories of what you see as a physician as the consequences of not addressing these issues.” In attendance at the lecture, Monica Kozak, MS2 shared, “Learning about Dr. Braveman’s work was inspiring and a much-appreciated reminder of why I came to med school.”

The lunch discussions offered a more informal environment. Conversations spanned how medical schools might ensure admitted students hold a genuine commitment to health equity beyond the buzzwords, how curricula could develop students’ understanding of these issues, and avenues to participate in multidisciplinary, international, and community health efforts. Dr. Braveman shared about her background, having been a philosophy major in undergrad, then being influenced by the community health center movement to become a physician and subsequently a researcher, so that she could offer practical skills to social movements. She discussed her own concerns about becoming disillusioned through medical training about the possibilities of being engaged in broader political organizing, an apprehension reflected by many students. The small groups sparked a sense of burgeoning community among students committed to improving health for...
and influence architecture, the benefits could be significant. If implemented successfully, it would reduce cases of all three illnesses. It does not face the same social, political, or administrative constraints as ending NMEs at the federal level. This alternative also largely preserves liberty.

The “As-Is” policy should not be discounted either. The fact that it (a lack of federal policy) is the default option is informative of the expectations that the citizens of the United States have of their government. It is offered as an additional option for this reason.

Major stakeholders are also important to discuss. The American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics have stated that they favor repealing NMEs, while the American Nurses Association and Association of American Physicians and Surgeons do not. Ending NMEs would divide these stakeholders, while the libertarian paternalist approach could unite them.

These policies use opposing paths to achieve the objective. Ending NMEs would require a federal policy and a database managed by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to monitor compliance. The libertarian paternalist approach would incentivize health care providers to use certain techniques. Thus, how one weighs the proper role of government will likely influence which alternative is most appealing or feasible.—
Eat This, Not That!

By: Lisa Schwartz, MS3

Every time we go to the grocery store, we make decisions that contribute to our wellness. These decisions make a huge impact, and if we don’t want to become someone’s patient, we must choose wisely. This article is going to be comparing items from Trader Joe’s, because, well, it’s my favorite, and if you’ve been there then it is probably yours too.

Whenever you can, always go for the unsweetened option. Don’t be fooled by the flax and the organic nature of the one on the right. Just one packet of the flax oatmeal has 12 grams of added sugar and who eats just one packet? Breakfast is the most important meal of the day and the added sugar will make your day anything but sweet. You can add your own flax seeds for the omega benefit without raising your blood sugar.

Also, did you know that oatmeal is a great breakfast to recommend to your diabetic patients? It is high in fiber so it slows the rate of carbohydrate absorption in the body. A recent meta-analysis of 14 studies showed a significant decrease in HbA1c of type 2 diabetics with the addition of oatmeal to one’s diet.

Salad dressing can be a tricky ingredient. You choose a healthy meal option like a salad, but if you pour mayonnaise, milk and cheese on it, which is in the item on the right, your waistline may never shrink. Don’t be fooled by the words “reduced fat” - always read all the ingredients. The ones on the left have 100% whole plant-based ingredients and therefore a much higher nutritional content.

Fruit is always the best choice but sometimes our white coat pockets are already stuffed and can’t fit a bowl of freshly cut strawberries. I hate when that happens. Luckily, we can have REAL dried fruit bars that have 1-2 ingredients. Don’t settle with fruit flavored candies which consist of oil and sugar as the first ingredients. Little substitutions like the ones above can make a big difference in your health. Good luck and make berry good choices!
“All babies are cute. Even the ugly ones.”
-Robbin Melo, MS3

“I’m so over Europe.”
-Nike Fanu, MS3

“The lymph node is mobile, but let me know if it becomes Arco.”
-Magi Ishak Gabra, MS3

“I’ve heard they’re ornery.”
-Dr Michael Epstein, on platypuses

“Indonesian Food with an Indonesian Person”

By: Sumedha Sinha, MS3

On November 18, 2017, at exactly 11:45 A.M, I received a text message which changed my life. MS3 Robbin Melo, aka “Buckets” asked if I was free to go to Tempe House the next day. Yes, that is correct. The one and only Buckets was willing to hang out with me even with the intense off season basketball schedule and tours. After months of pestering him about getting Indonesian food with me and multiple encounters where he had causally smiled it off, I was getting the chance of a lifetime… to have Indonesian food with a Filipino person.

As I rushed into the Tempe House located on 24984 3rd St, San Bernardino, an exclusive and earth shattering news was bestowed upon me. With great care and integrity of top investigative journaling, I would like to inform the world that Robbin Melo is actually Indonesian. Hmm who knew… I swear he said he was Filipino for the 2 1/2 years of our friendship. An intriguing mystery of life I have to say. Even according to the top MS3 resource guru, Calvin Sung, Cambodian would have been the next best guess. As I stammered through the shocking news, I had the opportunity to look around the quaint mom and pop store and calm my nerves with smell of the various dishes displayed at the store front. The restaurant had a practical and functional set up with Indonesian news being broadcasted in the back corner. There were beautiful scarves hanging on the wall, but the main focus of the place were the dishes. Brace yourselves readers for another fact: I’ve never had Indonesian food. Okay, before I create a bigger fiction, truthfully, my college days were filled with IndoMie instant ramen packets. Not authentic, but I felt at that time it was the closest thing I could afford to actual food… in general.

Anyways, walking up to the counter now with more confidence in my ability to navigate the array of dishes with Robbin with me, I did something quite touristy to put it best. I went down the line of all the food ("Indonesian" continues on p11)
Saturday lunch. The struggle in Robbin’s eyes. The best way to spend a meal with someone I pestered. Great conversations boot. The best part of the experience was to have a House sealed the deal for me. The prices are great to all swimming in sauce of different spices and chilies. Were hints of coconut and basil throughout the dish great kick and the meat was filled with flavor. There mouth watering sensation. The spicy chicken had tofu and filet of fish mixed together to create a delicious. As I bite into the crunchy tempeh, the fried marinated for a 3 days in a blend of chili paste, spices and prepare. For example, the beef stew is first marinated for a 3 days in a blend of chili paste, spices and coconut oil before being stewed for hours. “That’s what makes the meat so tender” as Robbin drove his plastic spoon (failingly) in the meat. When asked which dishes he likes to cook, he responded the best way an all star world athlete could, “My mom cooks.” It was clear Robbin was in love with his mom’s home made food, which was adorable. “The food here is authentic. My mom’s food is spicier... and saltier. But that can be my mom’s cooking.” For Robbin, Indonesian food is not about health or appearance, it’s about the taste. “Indonesian food is very unhealthy because lots of things are fried. Everyone has hypertension or diabetes.” But it’s darn delicious. As I bite into the crunchy tempeh, the fried tofu and filet of fish mixed together to create a mouth watering sensation. The spicy chicken had great kick and the meat was filled with flavor. There were hints of coconut and basil throughout the dish all swimming in sauce of different spices and chilies. The bold favors and the many options at the Tempe House sealed the deal for me. The prices are great to boot. The best part of the experience was to have a meal with someone I pestered. Great conversations on my side matched with look of sadness and struggle in Robbin’s eyes. The best way to spend a Saturday lunch.—

Los Angeles—a city known for many things around the world. Synonymous with the bright lights of Hollywood and the intersection of culture, LA is nothing short of unique. Perhaps most quintessential about this city is its sports culture. At the core is of course the unmistakable purple and gold. For any true Southern California native, the Lakers are everything about this city. For all the hoopla about college football, hockey, or even baseball, the Lake Show reigns supreme (not the other LA team that rhymes with the “slippers.”) With sixteen championships, there are few franchises in sports, let alone basketball, that match the success of the Lakers. To go along with that winning pedigree, the list of Hall of Fame legends that have graced the Laker jersey extends even longer. From Shaquille O’Neal to Magic Johnson to James Worthy there isn’t a list long enough to highlight the Laker stardom.

Unfortunately, it doesn’t take a sports connoisseur to figure out the Lakers have been nothing short of dreadful the past four seasons. The departure of the great Kobe “Bean” Bryant only served to accentuate the shortcomings of this once extremely successful franchise. In the past, the Lakers always abided by the motto of “reload not rebuild.” After missing out on marquee star players across the league, the Lakers quickly found themselves without a cornerstone to anchor their lofty ambitions of returning to glory. Coupled with a series of poor executive decisions, the Lakers are now in an unparalleled era of mediocrity. The Lakers have not made the playoffs for four straight years and with the Western conference becoming increasingly competitive, the cycle may be tough to break.

With the beginning of the 2017 season, things might be looking up for the Lakers. With three consecutive drafts with top 5 prospects, the Lakers have a young and most importantly exciting core to move forward with. Most recently, the addition of Chino Hills native Lonzo Ball has Lakers fans excited for the return of up-tempo and entertaining basketball. Adding to the roster is another young player named Brandon Ingram with his tall frame and sleek ball handling ability. The ultimate hope is that these young Lakers will play well enough this season to attract more established basketball players in the 2018 offseason. While in the moment success is far-fetched for the Lakers faithful, it could potentially be on the horizon. Basketball glory may yet return to La La land sooner than later.—
Her pap results came back abnormal.

Go see if there's anything she wants to ASCUS.

Medical Movie Review: The Killing of A Sacred Deer

By: Rennie Burke, MS3

What is the difference between justice and revenge? This is the question that Yorgos Lanthimos asks in his new film “The Killing of a Sacred Deer.” At least, that’s what he would probably say. “Killing” is a ponderous, strange film more concerned with shocking its viewers than exploring the themes its story suggests, but that is no surprise for anyone who has followed the Greek director’s career. Beginning with “My Best Friend” in 2001, Lanthimos’s work has been defined in equal measure by both the upsetting images he creates and the darkly comic, perverse tone that surrounds them. His latest movie is no exception to this pattern, and while his failure to develop as a filmmaker may be frustrating, it indicates more clearly what he is trying to do as an artist: get a rise out of you.

The film opens with a remarkable recreation of an open heart surgery, to be performed by Dr. Steven Murphy (Colin Farrell). Steven runs a successful surgical practice with his friend, an anesthesiologist named Matthew (Bill Camp), and is happily married with two children to Dr. Anna Murphy (Nicole Kidman), an ophthalmologist. But, just as with the internally diseased yet normal appearing hearts he treats, something more baleful lies just under the surface. Steven has a secret life that involves a young man named Martin (Barry Keoghan). He meets Martin regularly, takes his every phone call, and seems to dote on him with expensive gifts and meals. But he also lies about who Martin is to other people, telling Matthew that he is a school friend of his daughter's interested in medicine. Martin has an off-putting, mildly sinister air, and as the movie progresses, he increasingly inserts himself into Dr. Murphy’s personal and professional life, showing up at his house for dinner, at his surgical practice before a surgery, and in the parking lot after work. Yet for all these invasions, Steven persists in lavishing attention on him. Spoilers ahead, as the secret of Matthew’s identity and the havoc it wreaks on Steven’s life comprises the bulk of the movie - and unleashes the philosophical themes ostensibly at its core.

Martin, we learn, is the son of a patient who died on the operating table under Steven’s care. Martin has never forgotten this. And, after finally meeting the Murphy family, Martin has an ultimatum for Steven: he must kill one of his family members, or they will all die of a mysterious illness with a cruel progression. It begins with (“Killing” continues on p13)
with progressive limb paralysis, followed by food refusal, and ultimately bleeding from the eyes and death. Steven will remain safe, but if he does nothing, he must watch his family members expire. If this horrific fate seems out of proportion to what Steven did, we later learn the deeper reason why: it was not simply a preventible medical error, but outright negligence. Steven had been drinking the morning he performed the operation, a fact that he concealed from everyone but his trusted anesthesiologist Matthew. Whether or not this directly caused the death of Martin’s father remains unclear, but it is enough for Martin to judge Steven guilty.

Lanthimos follows the Murphys as they see doctor after doctor, desperately trying to figure out the origin of the mysterious condition. The remainder of the film, however, is not really about what is causing the illness. There is no apparent cause, and it may as well be an act of God, with Martin serving as his vengeful messenger. The real struggle is within Steven’s soul. First, he grapples with whether to tell his family about Martin and his mystical ultimatum, and second, whether he should obey it. As the paralysis worsens, we are treated to a fantasia of disturbing, classically Lanthimosian images: Murphy’s children crawling around on the ground with scraped knees, Murphy attempting to force food in their mouths, and so on. Whether acted or not, seeing children - or anybody, frankly - in such degraded states is disturbing, and perhaps that is the point. But what does it amount to?

As the movie ended, Lanthimos had clearly succeeded at provoking his audience, as a chorus of boos erupted in my theater. While he masquerades as a maverick indie film director, Lanthimos is, at his core, a troll, a fact which I believe explains his rise since directing his breakout hit “Dogtooth” in 2009. That film, about an incestuous family that keeps its children totally isolated from the outside world and forces them to perform weird rituals like barking while on all fours and stabbing animals, was variously interpreted as an Iraq war allegory, a satirical look at the government of Lanthimos’s native Greece, and a number of other things. One could be forgiven at the time for mistaking Lanthimos for a person with something important to say, but since then, his output has served primarily to establish him as a filmmaker intent on provoking at all costs. In doing so, he crafts some memorable images, but generally has little to say.

Even if he provides no answers, however, the question Lanthimos raises in “Killing” continues on p14)
“Killing” is an important one: what do we mean by justice? By the time we join him in the story, Steven Murphy is a reformed man who had avoided alcohol since the death of Martin’s father. If one purpose of punishment is to protect a community from people that might harm it, then that purpose has already been served. Steven does not drink, and takes great with his patients. Yet for many this is not enough. There needs to be a balancing of the cosmic scales, so that the aggressor feels the weight of the pain he’s caused the victim(s). This is what Martin, with the mysterious supernatural will of the universe behind him, demands, and many others surely agree. Look at the comment section of any Facebook story about a person who has abused a family member or an animal, and you will find a chorus of voices calling for punishments that recall Medieval Europe. Unfortunately, on this question of justice vs. revenge, Lanthimos provides no answers, nor even any apparent willingness to engage with the moral dilemmas it raises unless it gives him the opportunity to craft scenes of body horror.

While his eye for unsettling imagery is probably his most defining characteristic, a key component of Lanthimos’s aesthetic is an odd acting style where the performers deliver their lines in a rapid-fire monotone while remaining physically expressionless. The overall effect is unnerving and strange; watching his films for the first time, one feels that something is off, but it is unclear exactly what that is. This stylistic quirk serves two additional purposes. When the audience expects emotion, either in line-reading or in an actor’s physicality, then gets denied it, it makes the scene even funnier (or weirder), an effect he uses often in this film. Conversely, when the actors are occasionally allowed a flash of emotion, it makes the moment that much more striking. The few moments in this film of raw emotional intensity are, admittedly, powerful, and probably would not have been so had it not been for Lanthimos’s oddball style.

The unusualness of Lanthimos’s style makes evaluating the performances difficult, because they are so unlike the more naturalistic ideal that most modern actors and directors strive for. Despite that, actor Barry Keoghan, seen earlier this year in Christopher Nolan’s “Dunkirk,” gives a standout performance as Martin. Discomfort and, eventually, menace, permeates every scene he is in. The other actors all acquit themselves well within Lanthimos’s weird constraints, but this is Keoghan’s movie.

Provocation cinema is not yet considered a genre, but Lanthimos’s ongoing popularity and our ongoing cultural moment of trolling - make a strong case that it should be. With roots stretching back to Salvador Dali’s cinematic experiments that showed viewers eyeballs being sliced with razors, to Michael Haneke’s films in which characters turn to the camera and admonish viewers for their bloodlust, provocation cinema has had an illustrious run. Today, Lanthimos is its foremost practitioner. Thus, you may come away from watching “The Killing of a Sacred Deer” with a better understanding of humanity, but not in the way that Lanthimos intends. While the characters in the film itself, and the suffering they endure, is ultimately pointless and uninteresting, the mind that conjured up all of this mess and inflicted on us most certainly is.—
“Pepper in the Park”
Madeline Saavedra, MS3
2017, Painting

“I painted this piece because Pepper is a natural born muse and I attempted to translate her beauty and raw essence onto canvas.”

“Arch of Cabo San Lucas”
Spencer Wang, MS2
2017, Photography

“A neat rock formation.”
Special Recognition to:

Margaret Clark, MS3
Spencer Wang, MS2
Vinson Vong, MS2
Rachell Enriquez, UCR SOM Outreach Coordinator

For finding Waldo in the previous issue! (pictured left). This month's challenge: email the correct number of turkeys decorating this issue to receive a special shout out! Email the Editor in Chief at rlis001@medsch.ucr.edu.

and

McKenna Geary, MS3 and Dr Michael Epstein, UCR Child Psychiatrist

For their dedication both to Halloween and to their esteemed work in Child Psych (pictured right as Rey and Kylo Ren for Halloween 2017).

This year, The Scope is thankful for our enormous fan base and the extremely lax guidelines regarding school publications! We are ever grateful for our off staff writers, this issue including Kathryn Lewis, Zara Khan, Rebecca Ocher, Annie Le, and Christopher Lis. Further thanks to Scope artists, this month including Madeline Saavedra and Spencer Wang. We encourage you to participate in next month's Scope Student/Doctor/Faculty/Staff Member of the Year (see details above right). If you’re interested in writing for The Scope, please email the Editor in Chief at: rlis001@medsch.ucr.edu. If you are interested in submitting artwork, please email the Senior Editor at: khoa.nguyen@medsch.ucr.edu. All of us at The Scope hope that you had a wonderful Thanksgiving with family and/or friends! Best of luck to MS1s and MS2s in their upcoming finals! Until the next glorious issue!—