

An Open Letter to William Strampel, Dean of the College of Osteopathic Medicine

May 2, 2017

Dear Dean Strampel,

A few days ago I read an article in the Washington Post that contained information that, for me, was very new. What I read were excerpts of your emails to Larry Nassar and other MSU officials regarding my police complaint where I alleged that Nassar has sexually assaulted me 16 years earlier. It was an incredibly painful article to read. It reminded me again why Larry Nassar was able to assault me, and so many other women and children, for so long. And it left me with many questions. Questions that I am going to ask now, so that perhaps someday, if someone else who reads this is in your shoes, they will think to ask these questions. And if they do, maybe—just maybe—a predator’s reign will end a little sooner, and some little girls or boys will sleep without the nightmares they would otherwise have.

The part that caught my eye was when the Post reported that you met with Larry to discuss my police and Title IX report. You assured another MSU official Larry would only miss work “for a short time” during the investigation. When you heard that I’d talked to the IndyStar, you told Larry “good luck” and “I’m on your side.”

I understand that you knew Larry well, and you didn’t know me, but I wonder, when you made that determination about what I’d alleged and who you supported, did you know my police and Title IX report contained the names of four medical experts, including three pelvic floor specialists, that I’d consulted over a span of more than 10 years, as I desperately tried to figure out what had happened to me? Did you know all four said Larry’s alleged “treatment” was well outside the bounds of any recognized medical technique and all of them were willing to say so?

Did you know I had medical records and four witnesses showing I had been investigating Larry’s supposed treatment and consistently telling the same story, for 15 years, as I searched for answers? Did you read any of the national and international medical information I presented to both sets of investigators demonstrating what real pelvic floor therapy looked like, versus what your friend did to me? Did you read my written, point-by-point refutation of the videos Larry says show exactly what he does?

Did you care about any of that evidence when you said Larry would be off for “just a short time,” or did you not even bother to hear the evidence, before wishing Larry “good luck” and deciding you were “on his side”? And since that was your response to me, with everything I brought, knowing what an uphill fight this would be, no wonder you didn’t listen to the woman who pleaded to be heard in 2014 too. Have you thought at all about the little girls who walked into Larry’s exam room since you welcomed him back in 2014, without putting any accountability or follow-up structure in place to make sure he followed the guidelines of his reinstatement?

And when you saw my interview and it was forwarded around the office, did you consider that the statistical likelihood of a false accusation is a mere 2-8%, and Larry had already been accused, as you knew (though I did not) at least one other time of sexual assault in 2014? And did you consider that the news report contained a *third* independent claim of sexual assault against Larry, and that all of us were completely unconnected, and acted without any coordination—making it almost statistically impossible that we were all lying or “confused”?

I read your response to the anticipated media blitz: “I expect that this will be all over the paper tomorrow . . . Cherry on the Cake of my day!!!” I wonder, as you forwarded my video interview around and made light of what this would do to *your* day, did you once think about what my day was like when my image and details about my body—which no one was ever supposed to know—became national headlines?

Did you draw on any of the knowledge you have—or should have—about the impact of childhood sexual assault and consider what it would cost a busy mother of three to decide to take on a man like Nassar? To lay bare those graphic details in a way that would never allow me to regain privacy and confidentiality? Did you pause, even for a moment, to wonder what motivation I and these other women, all independent of each other, could have had to choose to relive that pain in front of a national audience?

You didn’t know I lost 10 pounds in one week because I was so physically ill after giving that interview that I could barely eat. You didn’t know I had nightmares every single night for more than three months because I couldn’t escape the details. You didn’t know that the desire to protect myself, the fear, and the feeling of constant vulnerability, all returned with a vengeance because the memories were so close to the surface and I couldn’t get away. You didn’t know any of this. But you never asked. You never considered the evidence. Not once. Not at all. You watched my testimony, joked about how much it would mess up your day, and wished Larry “good luck.”

“I’m on your side.” His side. Not my side. Not the side of his other victims.

And that is why we are here today with dozens of other young women who also have nightmares they can’t escape.

You can’t go back and ask the questions that you should have been asking all along. The damage is done. Little girls walked through Nassar’s door for years while you were the Dean, and came back out scarred in ways you’ll never understand. And you were wishing him “good luck.” But my sincere hope is that other men and women in authority will watch this unfold and, when they are faced with a similar situation, make a different decision. I pray they will ask the tough questions, and then wait for the answers, before deciding who to tell “I’m on your side.”

Sincerely,

Rachael Denhollander