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Lantern Theater Company Partners with Thomas Jefferson University to Present a Showcase of Original Plays as Part of *The Empathy Project*

PHILADELPHIA, PA (May 19, 2016) – **Lantern Theater Company** will present a showcase of original plays by medical students and faculty as part of **Sidney Kimmel Medical College at Thomas Jefferson University**'s Reader's Theater event "The Truth Beneath: Five Stories You Haven't Heard From Your Provider." The culmination of the second year of *The Empathy Project*, this event will be held on **Tuesday, May 31 at 6:00 p.m.** at the Herbut Auditorium, located on the Ground Floor of the College Building, 1025 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107. Attendees are encouraged to RSVP in advance to cgetting@lanterntheater.org or **(215) 829-9002, ext. 104**.

The Empathy Project, a unique partnership between the Lantern and Jefferson, is a 15-week introduction to drama, acting, and playwriting for medical and health professions students, residents, and Jefferson faculty. It is designed to foster empathy and creativity among healthcare students and professionals. This program was carried out in collaboration with Lantern teaching artists and made possible by a generous grant on 'Professionalism' from The Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation and Institute on Medicine as a Profession (IMAP).

Lantern Theater Company Artistic Director **Charles McMahon** says, "Our company has long held the belief that theater should enrich the life of its community by providing people with unique experiences and uncommon perspectives that help us to create greater context and meaning in our lives. We are naturally very intrigued by the possibility of engaging in practical application of these principals, and feel that this collaboration with Thomas Jefferson University has the potential to open up new ways our respective fields can enrich each other."

“Theater is not entertainment,” said **Salvatore Mangione, M.D.**, pulmonologist and director of physical diagnosis-clinical skills at Sidney Kimmel Medical College at Thomas Jefferson University. “The Greeks created drama to be catharsis by proxy. It is a tool to understand the human condition.”

Dr. Mangione’s goal is for the students to develop skills, like empathy and tolerance for ambiguity, which will assist them in their future careers and help prevent burnout. “Short of experiencing pain and suffering, it’s watching it – and even more acting it – that can provide us with a first-row seat to the theater of life. This in turn can foster empathy and tolerance for ambiguity,” said Dr. Mangione.

The drama programs allowed approximately 20 students and faculty to spend 15 weeks exploring a variety of acting and playwriting techniques, culminating in the end-of-the-year, staged reading of short plays. The staged readings will be directed by **M. Craig Getting** (Lantern’s education director) and **Kittson O’Neill** (artistic director of Shakespeare in Clark Park and artistic associate at Interact Theatre Company), both of whom are teaching artists in the Lantern’s education department.

Last year’s Reader’s Theater event featured six plays performed for an audience of 100 students, faculty, and community members and was featured on an episode of WHYY’s *The Pulse*. Speaking to WHYY, Jefferson student **Yasmine Koukaz** said, “It gave me a new perspective on how to see people, both patients and just day to day. And I think that will percolate into patient care each and every day.”

About Jefferson – Health is all we do.

Thomas Jefferson University, Thomas Jefferson University Hospitals, and Jefferson University Physicians are partners in providing the highest-quality, compassionate clinical care for patients, educating the health professionals of tomorrow, and discovering new treatments and therapies that will define the future of healthcare. Thomas Jefferson University enrolls more than 3,600 future physicians, scientists, and healthcare professionals in the Sidney Kimmel Medical College (SKMC); Jefferson Schools of Health Professions, Nursing, Pharmacy, Population Health; and the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences; and is home of the National Cancer Institute (NCI)-designated Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center. Jefferson University Physicians is a multi-specialty physician practice consisting of over 650 SKMC full-time faculty. Thomas Jefferson University Hospitals is the largest freestanding academic medical center in Philadelphia. Services are provided at five locations – Thomas Jefferson University Hospital and Jefferson Hospital for Neuroscience in Center City Philadelphia, Methodist Hospital in South Philadelphia, Jefferson at the Navy Yard, and Jefferson at Voorhees in South Jersey. More information is online at www.jefferson.edu.

About Lantern Theater Company

Lantern Theater Company is currently producing its twenty-second season with a record number of subscribers, its largest-ever operating budget at \$1.3M, and a growing community of theater artists engaged in its productions and audience engagement events. The company recently launched the **Lantern Theater Artist Fair Pay Initiative**, a pioneering program to increase the compensation of its contract theater artists by 50% beginning with the current season. Founded in 1994, the Lantern seeks to be a vibrant, contributing member of its community, exposing audiences to great theater, inviting participation in dialogue and discussion, engaging audience members on artistic and social issues, and employing theatrical language and techniques to enrich learning in the classroom. Since the inception of the Barrymore Awards for Excellence in Theatre in 1995, the Lantern has received 88 nominations and 19 awards, including the 2009 Excellence in Theatre Education and Community Service Award for its innovative education program, *Illumination*. More information is online at www.lanterntheater.org.