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BEFORE THE BOARD OF PHARMACY						
DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS STATE OF CALIFORNIA						
J	Case No. 5883					
LOS ANGELES COUNTY/USC MEDICAL CENTER	ACCUSATION					
1200 North State St. RM A1C109 Los Angeles, CA 90033						
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1990 Del Mar Avenue						
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Pharmacist License No. RPH 38427						
Respondent.	٩					
Complainant alleges:	•					
<u>PARTIES</u>						
1. Virginia Herold (Complainant) brings this Accusation solely in her official capacity						
as the Executive Officer of the Board of Pharmacy, Department of Consumer Affairs (Board).						
2. On or about August 24, 2008, the Board issued Pharmacy Permit No. PHE 49214 to						
County of Los Angeles to do business as Los Angeles County/USC Medical Center (LAC/USC						
County of Los Angeles to do business as Los An	geles County/USC Medical Center (LAC/USC					
County of Los Angeles to do business as Los An Medical Center and/or Respondent), a pharmacy						
	300 So. Spring Street, Suite 1702 Los Angeles, CA 90013 Telephone: (213) 620-3005 Facsimile: (213) 897-2804 Attorneys for Complainant BEFORE BOARD OF DEPARTMENT OF CONTAINENT OF CONTA					

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29. Respondent Siu also provided a written statement about the fraudulent activity, which stated that on March 19, 2014, a pharmacy clerk, M.P. had notified Pharmacy Service Chief II, S.D., that she was concerned about an employee, L.L., who was working as a ward clerk on Ward 3C (the OB-GYN ward) of the hospital, because L.L. was coming to the pharmacy and picking up patient prescriptions. When M.P. became suspicious of L.L. and started asking questions, L.L. would not talk to M.P. and waited for other employees to conduct her transactions. M.P. requested other pharmacy staff make copies of L.L.'s signed receipts. S.D.'s investigation revealed that all of the patients L.L. picked up medications for were receiving Norco and were from Ward 3H (OB triage unit) of the hospital. In addition, S.D.'s investigation revealed that the physicians on Ward 3H do not normally write prescriptions for Norco because they prefer writing prescriptions for Percocet. The Human Resources Department removed L.L. from Ward 3C and notified the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department. S.D. was notified by the L.A. Sheriff's Department that they found blank prescriptions in L.L.'s possession. A statement from staff pharmacist L.L. documented that he had preformed an audit of generic Norco 10/325 tablets for the audit period from February 17, 2014 through March 25, 2014, which showed a loss of 298 tablets, or a difference of 2%.

30. On March 4, 2015, a Board Inspector conducted an inspection at LAC/USC Medical Center's Outpatient Pharmacy (the pharmacy). She met with PIC Siu and he informed the Inspector that the Department of Health Services (DHS) conducted a full investigation and would have additional information about the diversion case. The Inspector interviewed M.P., who confirmed that a clerk from Ward 3C would often state she was picking up medication for the patient to speed up the discharge process. L.L. had the appropriate patient identification cards to drop off the prescriptions and sometimes signed the patient's name instead of her own name.

M.P. grew more suspicious of L.L. and receipts which L.L. signed for the patient prescriptions were copied. M.P. noticed L.L. began to "avoid" her help at the prescription intake window.

After one of the prescriptions which L.L. picked up for a patient required a payment to the finance office, which L.L. was willing to pay for, M.P. notified S.D.

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- 31. Respondent Siu told the Inspector that S.D. conducted an investigation in conjunction with the nursing staff and he believed L.L. was placed on administrative leave or suspended from her job, pending the outcome of the DHS investigation. A new "Discharge Medication Pickup by Nursing Staff" Policy, #251, was instituted shortly after the incident to help prevent similar, future diversions of drugs. In addition, they acquired a new computer system in order to integrate the exchange of information between various departments of the hospital. The Inspector obtained a copy of Policy #251. The Inspector also obtained copies of 55 original prescriptions suspected of either being diverted, altered, or forged by the ward clerk.
- 32. On March 10, 2015, the Board's investigator spoke with DHS Investigator A.H., who informed him that he obtained information about the diversion from all different departments of the hospital and found shortfalls in the policies and procedures at various levels. A.H. stated the ward clerk, L.L., had access to patient prescriptions and would alter them from Percocet to Norco herself. L.L. may have obtained a controlled substance prescription pad from past resident doctors who were no longer at the facility. A.H. also indicated that L.L. was arrested by the L.A. Sheriff's Department, but no criminal charges were filed by the L.A. City attorneys (or L.A. District Attorney's Office). L.L. was placed on administrative leave and she filed a request to resign her position, effective March 31, 2015. Furthermore, A.H. found a policy allowing pharmacy staff access to a physician's directory to look up current resident doctors; however, this directory had not been properly maintained/updated and the amount of residents coming and going from the hospital made it extremely difficult to research current resident doctors. Also, it was common practice for younger resident physicians to write or make corrections to prescriptions adding to the potential confusion of prescription writing styles and causing there to be multiple types of ink on the prescriptions themselves.
- 33. The Board's Investigator subsequently requested and received a redacted copy of the DHS report related to L.L.'s diversion of drugs, which documented various violations, including but not limited to pharmacy supervision, in failing to ensure pharmacists were thoroughly screening controlled prescriptions for accuracy, for allowing non-pharmacists to pick up controlled substance medications, for failing to furnish drugs only to a patient with a

legitimate prescription, and the pharmacist's corresponding responsibility to ensure a prescription for a controlled substance is issued only for a legitimate medical purpose. The DHS report concluded that L.L. admitted to altering and forging prescriptions allowing her to obtain Norco from the pharmacy. L.L. was able to obtain Norco because the pharmacy released controlled substances to a non-licensed employee, in violation of LAC/USC Medical Center Department of Nursing Services Policy #922. Moreover, the report concluded that the unmaintained electronic database of clinician credentialing information was operational, but was not routinely utilized by pharmacists and pharmacy staff when screening and verifying prescribers' credentialing information before approving prescriptions.

- 34. Furthermore, the DHS report indicated that 38 of the 51 prescriptions appeared to have been forged and 13 appeared to have been altered. The dates on the prescriptions were often backdated and did not correlate with the dates the patients were seen at the medical center. The fraudulent prescriptions were written by 19 past and present LAC/USC Medical Center physician post-graduates assigned to the OB-GYN 3C and 3H ambulatory care areas where L.L. worked. None of the patients complained that they did not receive their medications.
- 35. Between April 7, 2015 and April 17, 2015, the Board's Investigator requested and received additional information and documents from Respondent Siu related to LAC/USC Medical Center pharmacy's policies and procedures related to the processing of prescriptions.
- 36. The prescriptions obtained from LAC/USC Medical Center involved 62 total prescriptions, the majority of which were written for, or altered to, Norco 10/325 mg, and were dated between February 2, 2012 and February 22, 2014. The evidence appeared to show that L.L. gained possession of the controlled prescription pads of multiple physicians to forge 37 prescriptions for Norco 10/325 mg and two prescriptions for Colace 100 mg (a stool softener).
- 37. Prescription RX# 0121871884600 for Patient I.R. dated June 23, 2012 was changed from Colace to Norco 10/325 mg of 60 tablets with an additional refill. The date on the prescription appears to have been altered. These two combined items make for a potentially erroneous or uncertain prescription which required further investigation by a pharmacist to verify the prescription's legitimacy, which apparently was not done. Similarly, Prescription RX#

0121531800 for Patient R.R. dated June 27, 2012 was originally written for Colace and altered by the addition of Norco 10/325 mg to the prescription and an alteration to the date. The majority of the altered prescriptions had the intended controlled substance (Percocet 5/325 mg) crossed out and Norco 10/325 mg written into the next empty box of the prescription. In each case, the Percocet was written for a quantity between 30-50 tablets with no additional refills, and the addition of the Norco were all written for a quantity of 60 tablets and three additional refills. These alterations make for a potentially erroneous or uncertain prescription requiring further investigation by the pharmacist to verify their legitimacy.

38. Because all of the altered prescriptions appear to have the changes made in a different handwriting and, in some instances, a different colored ink pen, they make for a potentially erroneous or uncertain prescription requiring further investigation by the pharmacist to verify their legitimacy. After reviewing all of the prescription data and summarizing the total quantity of controlled substances available (original quantity and additional refills), the Board's Investigator prepared the following table:

Drug	Diverted Rx	Altered Rx	Forged Rx	Total No. of Tablets
Norco 10/325 mg	245	2,100	7,020	9,365
Percocet 5/325 mg	20	0	0	20

39. On May 6, 2015, the Board's Investigator had a conference call with Respondent Siu, Pharmacy Director S.M. and Pharmacy Supervisors S.D. and B.B. for the purpose of having them explain the steps which they took to investigate L.L.'s theft/diversion of the hydrocodone and provide updated findings and documentation about the final count of 8,895 tablets. Respondent Siu indicated that refills for prescriptions could have been called into the automated refill line and the generic patient ID cards (no picture ID was required for medications schedule CIII or below) could have been generated on the ward where L.L. worked and had access to the patients' records. In addition, prior to the audit, all stock bottles with schedule CIII and below were stored in a locked cabinet in the Main Pharmacy with numerous "open" bottles on the pharmacy dispensing line. The medications were inventoried on a monthly basis. After the audit on or

about March 25, 2014, the number of "open" bottles were limited, inventory checks were increased to every other week, and specific "controlled substance cabinet" pharmacists were assigned per shift with key access to the cabinet, among other changes.

- 40. On May 15, 2015, the Board's Investigator received an e-mail from Respondent Siu, with various reports attached, including but not limited to a summary which lists the final, updated count of Norco 10/325 mg dispensed to L.L. by way of diversion, alteration or forgery as 8,895 tablets.
- 41. The Board's Investigator prepared an updated table related to the quantity of controlled substances which were diverted, altered and/or forged by L.L., based upon a comparison of LAC/USC Medical Center's dispensing data and original prescriptions, as follows:

Drug	Diverted Rx	Altered Rx	Forged Rx	Total No. of Tablets
Norco 10/325 mg	15	1,980	6,900	8,895
Percocet 5/325 mg	0			0

- 42. On June 10, 2015, in response to the Board's Investigator's e-mail, Respondent Siu replied to his e-mail with additional information. Respondent Siu stated that the pharmacists did not report any of the prescriptions at issue to the Quantifi computer system and the pharmacists did not realize these prescriptions were forged at the time of dispensing.
- 43. The Board's investigation confirmed that there were similar violations of policy and procedure by pharmacy staff as those documented in the DHS report. The pharmacy staff failed to ensure the security of the prescription department against the potential diversion of medications by not utilizing the file of credentialed LAC/USC Medical Center clinicians, per Pharmacy Department Policy and Procedure Manual #605, and by not verifying the authenticity of any of L.L.'s questionable prescriptions as required by their Pharmacy Department Policy and Procedure Manual, #240 (Pharmacy Interventions) and #205 (Outpatient Prescription Guidelines). In addition, the pharmacy staff should have been educated on Nursing Services Police #922 (controlled substances will be handled only by licensed staff), and should not have allowed L.L. to "transport" controlled substance discharge medications of the hospital because she was employed as an unlicensed ward clerk.

FIRST CAUSE FOR DISCIPLINE

(Respondents LAC/USC Medical Center and Siu - Prescriptions Containing Errors, Omissions, Irregularities, Uncertainties and/or Alterations)

44. Respondent LAC/USC Medical Center and Respondent Siu, while employed as the PIC of LAC/USC Medical Center, have subjected their pharmacy permit and pharmacist license, respectively, to discipline for unprofessional conduct pursuant to Sections 4301, subdivisions (j) and/or (o), in conjunction with Sections 4059, 4060 and 4113, Health and Safety Code sections 11152, 11153, 11157, 11158, subdivision (a), 11164, 11167 and 11171, and California Code of Regulations, title 16, sections 1709.1, 1716 and 1761, subdivisions (a) and (b), in that for a two-year period ending on April 22, 2014, an unlicensed ward clerk of LAC/USC Medical Center was able to alter 13 prescriptions for hydrocodone/ acetaminophen 10/325 mg, a narcotic controlled substance, in an amount totaling approximately 1,980 tablets, due to the pharmacy staff failing to uphold the pharmacy department's policies and procedures to determine the legitimacy of the altered prescriptions. The underlying facts and allegations are set forth with more particularity above, in Paragraphs 28-43, which are incorporated by reference.

SECOND CAUSE FOR DISCIPLINE

(Respondent LAC/USC Medical Center - Failure to Maintain Effective Control and Security of Dangerous Drugs)

45. Respondent LAC/USC Medical Center is subject to disciplinary action under Section 4301, subdivisions (o) and/or (j), in that Respondent violated California Code of Regulations, title 16, section 1714, subdivision (b), by failing to provide effective control and security against the loss or diversion of dangerous drugs/controlled substances. Specifically, an audit of LAC/USC Medical Center revealed a total loss of 298 tablets of hydrocodone/acetaminophen 10/325 mg, a controlled substance, by an unknown origin between the period of time from approximately February 17, 2012 and March 25, 2014, a variance of 2.1 percent, as set forth above in Paragraphs 28-43, which are incorporated by reference.

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THIRD CAUSE FOR DISCIPLINE (Respondent Siu – Operational Standards and Security)

46. Respondent Siu is subject to disciplinary action under Section 4301, subdivisions (o) and (j) in that, while employed as the PIC of LAC/USC Medical Center, Respondent Siu violated Section 4113, subdivision (c) and California Code of Regulations, title 16, section 1714, subdivision (d), by failing to provide effective control and security against the loss or diversion of dangerous drugs/controlled substances from the pharmacy department. During an approximate two-year period ending on April 22, 2014, an unlicensed ward clerk of LAC/USC Medical Center was able to divert, alter and forge prescriptions for hydrocodone/ acetaminophen 10/325 mg, a controlled substance, in an amount totaling 8,895 tablets. In addition, a LAC/USC Medical Center audit revealed a total loss of 298 tablets of hydrocodone/acetaminophen 10/325 mg, by an unknown origin between approximately February 17, 2012 and March 25, 2014, a variance of 2.1%, as set forth above in Paragraphs 28-43, which are incorporated here by reference.

FOURTH CAUSE FOR DISCIPLINE (Respondents LAC/USC Medical Center and Siu - Furnishing Drugs Without a Prescription)

47. Respondent LAC/USC Medical Center and Respondent Siu are subject to disciplinary action under Sections 4300 and 4301, subdivisions (j) and (o), on the grounds of unprofessional conduct, for violating Sections 4059, subdivision (a), 4126.5, subdivision (a) and 4113, and Health and Safety Code sections 11152, 11153, 11157, 11158, subdivision (a), 11164, subdivision (a), 11167 and 11171, for furnishing drugs/controlled substances without a legitimate prescription, as more fully set forth above in Paragraphs 28-43, and incorporated by reference.

DISCIPLINE CONSIDERATIONS

- 48. To determine the degree of discipline, Complainant alleges as follows:
- a. On or about September 23, 2014, the Board issued administrative Citation No. CI 2013 59355 against Respondent LAC/USC Medical Center for failing to ensure that prescriptions were dispensed in containers correctly labeled with the strength of the drug(s) dispensed, in violation of Sections 4076, subdivision (a)(7) and 4077, subdivision (a). No fine was issued with the citation.

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1 **PRAYER** WHEREFORE, Complainant requests that a hearing be held on the matters herein alleged, 2 and that following the hearing, the Board of Pharmacy issue a decision: 3 Revoking or suspending Pharmacy Permit PHE No. 49214, issued to County of Los 1. 4 5 Angeles dba Los Angeles County/USC Medical Center; Revoking or suspending Pharmacist License RPH No. 38427, issued to Alan R. Siu; 2. 6 3. Ordering Respondent Alan R. Siu to pay the Board of Pharmacy the reasonable costs 7 of the investigation and enforcement of this case, pursuant to Business and Professions Code 8 section 125.3; and 9 3. Taking such other and further action as deemed necessary and proper. 10 11 DATED: ///4/16 12 13 VIRGINIA HEROLD Executive Officer 14 Board of Pharmacy Department of Consumer Affairs 15 State of California Complainant 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27