

For 27 years, USC ignored warnings about a gynecologist nicknamed 'The Butcher' "I don't think anyone is paying attention, and it's horrible."

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The appointment took place 25 years ago, but Dr. Dana Loewy, a 58-year-old freelance author, still vividly remembers being treated by Dr. George Tyndall at the University of Southern California.

She was then a graduate student in her early 30s. The school's student health center served all of her medical needs, so naturally she went to see Tyndall, USC's only full-time gynecologist for 27 years.

But almost immediately, he made her feel uncomfortable. When she got in the stirrups, he openly gawked at her inner-thigh tattoo; when she expressed discomfort with his methods, he insisted she was a virgin, even though she was not; when she told him she was in a same-sex relationship, he visibly perked up and asked insensitive questions. She'd seen gynecologists before, and it was never a particularly enjoyable experience. But this was different. His behavior wasn't clinical; it was aggressive, and creepy. And that was before the exam itself began.

"He thrust his fingers inside of me, with force" Loewy told ThinkProgress in a phone interview this week. "After that, I called him, 'The Butcher' because he was so rough." She said the nickname caught on, because other women she confided in shared their own similar experiences. She just didn't know quite how many other women at the time.

Ten weeks ago, an [LA Times investigation](#) revealed that Tyndall allegedly sexually harassed and abused patients at USC for three decades. University officials admit they were notified of Tyndall's behavior as far back as 2000. Victims allege they notified officials in the medical center about the abuse as early as 1991. And yet he continued to work until 2017, when the university allowed him to retire quietly, with pay, after an internal investigation found evidence of misconduct.

Loewy is now one of [more than 300 women](#) suing USC for failing to protect them from Tyndall. This is quickly becoming one of the largest sex abuse scandals in U.S. history, a dubious distinction that has seemingly changed hands with each passing month. But there is no legendary coach's reputation at stake; no Olympic champions to provide victim-impact statements; no high-profile congressional leader to generate interest. Just hundreds of women who are speaking up, fighting for some sort of justice, some sort of culture change that can help restore the pride they once had in their alma matter.

This week, amid the fallout, USC president, C.S. Max Nikias announced his resignation. But he will advise the search for a new president, and remain a lifetime trustee. To survivor Brennan Heil, a rising senior at USC who says she was abused

by Tyndall her freshman year, this is merely a “band-aid.” It’s not a legitimate attempt at change and accountability.

Nobody seems to truly care that for three decades, USC allowed a trusted doctor to sexually abuse vulnerable patients, ignored reports about his misconduct, and then tried to cover up the scandal once it came to light. While the #MeToo movement keeps growing, Tyndall’s survivors sometimes feel like they’re shouting into the void.

“I don’t think anyone is paying attention, and it’s horrible,” Heil told ThinkProgress. “Nobody wants to hear it.”

The disturbing details of Tyndall’s crimes

According to the [original Times investigation](#) into Tyndall in May, the doctor regularly bragged about the fact that he gave up opportunities to earn more money in order to work with the young females at USC. He was very proud of his job; his license plate read “COEDDOC,” according to DMV records reviewed by the Times. He saw thousands of patients, sometimes up to 16 a day. In recent years, the Times says, he targeted Chinese students at the University, who were extremely vulnerable due to their limited English and unfamiliarity with the American medical system.

He was obsessed with virginity and the sexual history of his patients, far beyond what passes for medical relevance. When a Middle Eastern student went to him for a birth control prescription, she says he “offered me a little baggie of blood I could pop on my wedding night so my husband would think I was a virgin.” In another case, he allegedly asked a patient if he could keep her bloody IUD after he removed it.

Like he did with Loewy and her inner-thigh tattoo, he commented on the physical appearance of his patients. He once allegedly told a student she had “perky breasts,” adding, “They stand right up there, don’t they?” Witnesses told the Times he would have women lie naked on the exam table, and closely inspect every part of their body for moles.

Heil saw Tyndall in 2015, after she was raped during the winter break of her freshman year. She was a virgin at the time, and had never seen a gynecologist, but knew she needed to get an STD check since her rapist had not used a condom.

His demeanor and line of questioning immediately made her uneasy, just like it had with Loewy 22 years prior. He grilled her on the frequency with which she had sex, both oral and penetrative. He excitedly suggested the friend she brought to the appointment was her romantic partner. He made her question her knowledge of her own body when he insisted she didn’t have thyroid disease — which she had been previously diagnosed with — because she was skinny. He had her take off all her clothes, then mocked her because she hadn’t been in stirrups before. Things got worse when he started the full exam — an exam that was not necessary for a standard STD test.

“First he rubbed my clitoris, which was horrible,” Heil, who is currently 21, recalled. “And then he said, ‘Oh, you’re not loose enough, let’s get you more wet.’ Then he rubbed my clitoris again, then shoved the speculum up there, and continued to be very, very aggressive.”

There was a female chaperone in the room with Heil when the exam began; there often was, per university rules. But Heil says that during the assault, the chaperone said, “Okay, I’m uncomfortable,” and exited the room.

The [LA Times](#) reports that before examinations, Tyndall would often insert two fingers into the vagina to ensure the speculum would fit, and move his fingers in and out of them while saying, “My, what a tight muscle you have. You must be a runner.” According to lawsuits reviewed by ThinkProgress, many victims allege that he touched them with ungloved hands, which he would repeatedly and aggressively move in and out of their vagina.

Tyndall also took hundreds of photos of naked women and their genitals, under the guise of clinical research. One of those women was Amanda Davis, who was a 20-year-old single mom when she saw Tyndall back in 2001. He had her take off all her clothes, and then made small talk with her as her back was on the exam table. He talked about how much women’s bodies change after birth, and about the research he was doing into how women can get their pre-pregnancy bodies back. As part of his research, he said he needed to take naked photos of her.

“I didn’t get a chance to process it until after I left. I began to feel really embarrassed and ashamed,” Davis told ThinkProgress. “Now any time USC comes up, there’s this picture of him taking the photo of me, naked, that goes along with it.”

In 2016, a box full of photos of patients’ genitals was found in Tyndall’s cabinet in his office. They were from 1990 and 1991, and contained identifying patient information.

USC employees were repeatedly warned about Tyndall’s misconduct

Considering Tyndall didn’t seem particularly concerned about covering up his behavior — and it went on for more than a quarter of a century — it’s hard to treat his villainy as a case of a lone bad actor.

“Tyndall could not have done this alone. He had to have some kind of cover from USC for this to have gone on for so long,” Andy Rubenstein, a lawyer representing 51 of the women suing USC for failing to protect them from Tyndall, told ThinkProgress.

“USC is culpable. There’s a culture of silence and cover-up.”

The facts — and USC’s own admissions — back up Rubenstein’s claims. The university admits, for instance, that there were eight formal complaints filed against

Tyndall between 2000 to 2014, some for racist and insulting comments towards African Americans and Latinos, and others about sexual misconduct towards patients.

“Several of the complaints were concerning enough that it is not clear today why the former health center director permitted Tyndall to remain in his position,” the university said in a summary of its investigation into the matter, [which was published in response](#) to the LA Times investigation.

But even before 2000, victims recall telling officials at the medical center that they had concerns about Tyndall. In the early 1990s, [the Times reports](#) that chaperones became alarmed at how often Tyndall was taking pictures of his patients’ genitals, and questioned his motives. Executive Director Dr. Lawrence Neinstein reportedly ordered that Tyndall’s camera be removed, although other victims allege the inappropriate photographs continued to be taken throughout the next two decades.

Loewy told ThinkProgress that back in 1993, after her disturbing appointment with Tyndall, she arranged to see another doctor at the clinic. She told that doctor that Tyndall was “rough” and that she didn’t want to see him again. She also informed her about his inappropriate comments about lesbians. However, she recalls that the other doctor was not particularly receptive to her concerns.

“She was very uncomfortable, so I let it go,” Loewy said. “She was almost squirming. I thought, maybe it’s because she knows I’m gay.”

In 2013, after eight chaperones complained about Tyndall’s behavior, USC’s Office of Equity and Diversity conducted a small investigation, but found no official violations. The only specific outcome of that investigation was that gynecologists at the medical center were now barred from locking office doors while tending to patients.

In 2016 — after being repeatedly frustrated by supervisors and officials in the medical center ignoring concerns about Tyndall’s behavior from patients, chaperones, and nurses — veteran nurse Cindy Gilbert went to USC’s rape crisis center to report Tyndall. Soon after, Tyndall was suspended with pay while the university investigated the allegations against them. Ultimately, it concluded that he had “exhibited unprofessional and inappropriate behavior” and his exam methods were outside “current standards of care.” In 2017, after an agreement with USC, Tyndall resigned and received payment. USC did not report Tyndall to the medical board, or to the police.

USC [told the Times](#) it is not under any legal obligation to report Tyndall, though it did finally file a complaint with the medical board on March 9, about a month after the Times investigation began. [“In hindsight,”](#) the university admits it should have done so sooner.

“All these years, all these women could have not had this happened and gone on with their lives without all this pain they caused,” Davis said.

Police are now looking into the allegations against Tyndall, but as of now, no criminal charges have been filed.

Though Nikias resigned this week, he still has the support of the board. According to [board Chairman Rick Caruso](#), the controversies surrounding Nikias’s departure “have arisen from the unfortunate and unacceptable acts of others.”

“From our investigations, which are not yet completed, we have found absolutely no wrongdoing on Max’s part,” Caruso wrote.

The three survivors that ThinkProgress spoke with — Heil, Loewy, and Davis — all said that nobody from USC involved with the school’s ongoing investigation has reached out to them to discuss their allegations of abuse.

Meanwhile, Tyndall continues to proclaim his own innocence. He [spoke to the Times](#) for 10 hours this spring, and spent most of that time insisting he is the real victim in all of this. “At one point, he offered a theory that chaperones reported him because they had trouble reaching orgasm and were jealous of young patients with tighter pelvic muscles,” the Times reported.

Bolstered by #MeToo movement, survivors will continue to fight

Tyndall’s survivors know they are part of a larger cultural movement right now, and they’re ultimately encouraged by the conversations about sexual abuse and sexual harassment currently taking place throughout society. Loewy says she admired the courage of the survivors of Larry Nassar’s abuse at Michigan State and USA Gymnastics.

“It was very empowering,” she said.

Davis came forward primarily for her daughter, who was five when she graduated from USC, and is 21 years old now. But she decided not to be a Jane Doe when she [saw Terry Crews speak out](#) in front of Congress about the sexual abuse he endured.

“Something about his authenticity,” Davis said. “It was similar in a sense. His abuser was an authority figure, too. It just really resonated with me, and at that point, I knew I was all in. I wanted to come forward.”

While Loewy, Davis, and Heil were all moved by the support they have found from other survivors since coming forward, they’ve been frustrated by the response from USC. The university — which, unlike Michigan State, is private — has an extremely large board of trustees, and is incredibly secretive. Minutes of meetings aren’t made

public; the identities of some of the trustees are concealed; and there seems to be no opportunity for faculty, students, alumni, or survivors to have a seat at the table.

“They say they speak to all constituents, but I wish they would speak to us so we could get to the bottom of where the failures occurred. We would like to be part of the discussion,” Loewy said.

Heil, who is worried about what life will be like when she returns to USC’s campus in two weeks for the first time since she came forward, wants to see actions that go far beyond the removal of Nikias.

“I want institutional change,” she said. “I’d love to see that students are actually put first for once in our lives.”

While there are similarities between what happened at Michigan State and Ohio State, the USC survivors have a unique set of hurdles getting in the way of justice. Their case doesn’t have a household name attached to it; it doesn’t involve a sporting institution; and it happened at a private university, which isn’t held to the same transparency standards as a public school. But a doctor that was supposed to care for them violated their trust, and USC allowed him to abuse with impunity for decades. For 27 years, their complaints were silenced or ignored. No more.

“Before #MeToo, no one was really listening. I hope it will be sustained. But at my age, I’m 58, I know who I am and what I am. I will not be silenced,” Loewy said.