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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**February 19, 2021**

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**Pace: “Serving Lake County during the COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the most rewarding experiences and greatest challenges of my career”**

*Pace resigning as Public Health Officer, effective mid-April*

**Lake County, CA (February 19, 2021)** — This week, I made the very difficult decision to begin the process of resigning as Lake County’s Public Health Officer. My official last day in the role will likely be in mid-April, and I expect to provide support over a longer period, if needed. The Board will discuss a strategy to replace me during this Tuesday’s meeting.

Serving Lake County during the COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the most rewarding experiences and greatest challenges of my career. Particularly over these past 11 months, I have given all I had the capacity to give. I sought to listen to the needs of local residents, and provide safety measures and other health recommendations that best reflected the available science, knowing they would often be widely criticized.

While my primary responsibility has been to protect the health of Lake County’s communities, it has been truly heartbreaking to see the many types of consequences that have come for individuals and businesses in the past year.

The nearly 48,000 deaths in California, alone, have shook every one of us; no one can be unaffected. Many of our children have missed a full year of in-person instruction, and social barriers to educational attainment that are consequential even during the best of times have been greatly exacerbated. Add to that the still-mounting consequences to businesses of all sizes; relief has often come in the form of deferment of obligations or loans - the debt burden taken on by even businesses that have been able to survive the pandemic will reverberate in our communities for many years to come. We also continue to count the costs associated with mental health effects of the rapid social changes of the past year, and the social isolation that has too often stemmed from “social distancing” mandates.

I worked for over twenty years in family medicine, and am returning to clinical practice in the coming months. The effects things like this happening on even a small scale can have are well known to me, and this pandemic is in many respects an unprecedented disaster, bringing personal and economic tragedy to far too many families around the world.

Now, we stand at an inflection point in our pandemic response. The high boil of the initial crisis has transitioned toward a sustained, long-term-focused response that will require intensive partnership with the State and other organizations in our communities. Our COVID-19 vaccination effort, so key to a return to some kind of “normal,” is still in the early phases, but there is hope supply and distribution will continue to ramp up in the coming months.

While it won't be as your Public Health Officer, I look forward to continuing to be a part of the broader pandemic response, and helping to see patients through the days ahead.

My greatest sadness is leaving the relationships that have developed over the past few years. Thank you, to the many that have supported my work in Lake County. The team at the Health Services Department, under Denise Pomeroy's capable leadership, is truly remarkable. I have seen people at all levels of the organization do incredible things, and that lends great hope for the future.

I am also grateful for the way Board Members, Administration, and Department Heads and staff throughout County service have stepped up to support our pandemic response. There are many dedicated, capable people working to ensure Lake County residents have the best possible opportunity to emerge from this situation and build a bright future.

It will be a great honor to continue to work with many of you over the next month or so, and I truly believe better days are ahead for Lake County.

Gary Pace, MD, MPH