August 12, 2010

Dear Colleagues and Friends:

With a broken heart, today I must share with you the sad and unimaginable news of the premature departure from this earth of our much loved and respected Dr. John U. Balis, Emeritus Professor of Pathology and Cell Biology. John passed away at noon today in his birthplace of Kalamata, Greece, where he was sojourning after a momentous and happy trip to Istanbul with his loved son and family.

Dr. Balis received his doctorate of Medicine from the University of Athens and completed his studies in Pathology in the United States and Canada. His academic career began in the Department of Pathology at the University of Toronto in Canada, continued at Loyola University Stritch School of Medicine in Chicago and, since 1978, at the University of South Florida College of Medicine. In 2004, he retired after 40 years of a highly distinguished career in Academic Pathology.

Immediately after his joining USF, Dr. Balis became rapidly engaged in research, undergraduate and graduate teaching as well as in unselfish service to the College and the University at large. His positions were numerous and fundamental to the departmental mission and included those of Acting Chair between 1979 and 1982 and Director of Experimental Pathology and Research Laboratories, Medical Teaching, Electron Microscopy (both at the affiliated James A. Haley VA Hospital and USF), Autopsy Service and Pathology Alumni Foundation. His service to the College was outstanding especially as member and then chair of the Academic Promotion and Tenure Committee and as a key player in the reorganization and integration of the medical curriculum. Dr. Balis’ service to the University was equally outstanding and sustained as also witnessed by his heartfelt involvement, as one of the founding five members of the Greek Studies Council, in the launching of the American and International Foundations of Greek Language and Culture (AFGLC/IFGLC) and the development of five related endowed professorships. He served as the Executive Vice President of AFGLC from 1992 to 2007 and dynamic President since 2008.

Before concentrating his enthusiasm to the teaching of medical students and to the overall teaching mission of the College for which he received several Outstanding Preclinical Teaching Awards, Dr. Balis made highly significant scientific contributions to the field of experimental pathology with particular focus on pulmonary pathobiology. His research on the pulmonary surfactant system still stand the test of time, was routinely quoted by researchers in the field, and was extramurally support from the National Institutes of Health, the Veterans Administration, the American Heart Association and the U.S. Army. He served the scientific community as a reviewer of NIH and VA Merit grants and as a member of the NIH Pathology “A” Study Section.
From a personal point of view, John was a friend and a brother to me. We were united by a similar enthusiasm for the world of Medicine and Classic Culture. Lately, we maintained the good tradition of monthly dinners together with Dr. David Rowlands, a common friend and Past-Chair of Pathology; with John leading the way, conversations were never dull but always intellectually stimulating. Together with our wives and families, we shared many wonderful times especially those at the annual Cancer Conference at the Colony Beach Resort in Longboat Key and at periodical Pathology Chairs’ Retreats around the continent. Together, we shared the sorrows of the premature departure of our eternally loved wives. His advice on critical academic and professional matters was always sharp and much appreciated over time. I will miss him greatly.

I ask all of you to join me in remembering a great human being, a dedicated professional and an unabashed ambassador of the universal Greek Culture and Language.

Santo V. Nicosia, M.D.
Distinguished University Professor and Chair