PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

With Change Comes Opportunity

The external environment in which the Alliances operate changed dramatically early this year as the 114th Congress, First Session, convened with new Members, new Committee Chairs, and new staff. As you can see from this edition of the Report, NAEVR/AEVr and its member organizations have been engaged in Capitol Hill advocacy and education regarding National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Eye Institute (NEI) funding, as well as that for the Peer Reviewed Vision Research Program (VRP) within the Department of Defense (DOD).

From an Advocacy Day held by ARVO in early February to that held by Research to Prevent Blindness (RPB) in late March, researchers and private funding foundations have been advocating for increased funding for vision research in Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 appropriations. Both events had a special emphasis on the environment for young investigators—which NIH Director Francis Collins, M.D., Ph.D. has described as “the worst in the past 50 years.” Young investigators with a future stake in NEI funding visited their Members with ARVO, while the representatives of the private funding foundations described their increased role in funding young investigators due to tight NEI funding, as well as providing bridge funding to more seasoned investigators due to delays in the annual appropriations process.

The Alliances will continue this emphasis on young investigators with a series of events planned around the October 7-8, 2015, “Young Vision Investigators Day” on Capitol Hill. By the time you read this, AEVR will be announcing this program and recruiting young researchers. I am especially pleased that Ophthalmology Chairs and Optometry Deans have already been so responsive this year by sponsoring young investigators and supporting NAEVR advocacy in their states/districts.

Concurrently, AEVR has held its Congressional Briefings about NEI and VRP-funded research, which have been timed to support NAEVR’s funding requests. NAEVR has strong bipartisan support for increasing the VRP in FY2016 to $15 million—a $5 million increase over the FY2015-2015 appropriated levels. Although not all institutions are conducting eligible research in eye trauma, this funding source has netted $45 million for 60 researchers since it was created in FY2009. At the upcoming ARVO Annual Meeting in Denver, NAEVR will once again educate researchers about this funding opportunity. The box on the right lists several NAEVR/AEVr-supported sessions and, as always, Alliances’ Executive Director James Jorkasky will be present at the NAEVR Central Booth throughout the meeting.

Internally, the Alliances continue to see change as it relates to their Boards, as each has elected the following new Directors in 2015:

- Linda Hazlett, Ph.D., Chair, Department of Anatomy and Cell Biology, Wayne State University School of Medicine
- Iris Rush, CAE, Executive Director, Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology
- Earl Smith, O.D., Ph.D., Dean, College of Optometry, University of Houston

In late 2014, Ms. Rush was announced as the new Executive Director for ARVO, an Alliances founding member, and we welcome her extensive management experience. Additionally in late 2014, existing Director Steve Feldon, M.D. (Flaum Eye Institute/University of Rochester) was announced as the new Executive Vice President of the Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology (AUPO), also an Alliances founding member, who will now represent AUPO on the Boards. Immediate past AUPO EVP Bart Mondino, M.D., has been re-elected so that the Alliances can benefit from both Steve’s and Bart’s organizational experience. The box to the right lists the current Directors.

I could not close without acknowledging those Directors who recently rotated off of the Boards—John Dowling, Ph.D. (Harvard University) and Tony Adams, O.D., Ph.D (University of California at Berkeley), who each served on the Alliances’ Boards since they were created and long-time Director David Pyott, who recently retired from Allergan. I thank them for their contributions.

I also want to thank the vision community organizations that have committed time and financial resources to the Alliances in 2015.

Peter J. McDonnell, M.D.
NAEVR/AEVr Boards President
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Peter McDonnell M.D., William Holland Wilmer Professor and Director, Wilmer Eye Institute, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine

The Alliances’ Directors, in addition to Dr. McDonnell:

- Craig Crosson, Ph.D., Associate Dean for Research, Medical University of South Carolina
- Steven Feldon, M.D., Director, Flaum Eye Institute and Chair, Department of Ophthalmology, University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry
- Sabri Markabi, M.D., Senior Vice President, Research and Development and Chief Medical Officer, Alcon, Inc.
- Bartly Mondino, M.D., Director, Jules Stein Eye Institute, David Geffen School of Medicine at University of California Los Angeles
- Joan W. Miller, M.D., Chief and Chair of Ophthalmology, Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary, Harvard Medical School
- William Schmidt, J.D., Chief Executive Officer, Foundation Fighting Blindness
- Walter Stark, M.D., Chief, Division of Cornea, Cataract, & External Diseases, Wilmer Eye Institute/Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine
- David Tanzer, M.D., Chief Medical Officer and Divisional Vice President, Medical Affairs, Abbott Medical Optics, Inc.
- Thomas Yorio, Ph.D., Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, University of North Texas Health Science Center
- Karla Zadnik, O.D., Ph.D., Dean, Ohio State University School of Optometry

NAEVR/AEVr at the 2015 ARVO Annual Meeting

Saturday, May 2
ARVO’s Vision and Traumatic Brain Injury in Veterans and Athletes Session
10:00 am-12:00 pm, Mile High Ballroom, Section ICD, Colorado Convention Center

Sunday, May 3–Wednesday May 6

NAEVR Central
9:00 am–4:00 pm Daily, Located within ARVO Central

Monday, May 4
NAEVR’s Defense-Related Vision Research Opportunities Session
7:30 am–8:30 am, Room 205/207, Colorado Convention Center

Monday, May 4
Meeting Eye Health Needs Session
11:00 am–12:45 pm, Mile High Ballroom, Section ICD, Colorado Convention Center.
Attitudinal Survey of Americans on Eye and Vision Health
12:30 pm, Based on AEVR’s 2014 study