President’s Message

NEI and NAEVR/AEVR – Each Setting Audacious Goals

Stephen Ryan, M.D.

I offer my congratulations to NAEVR/AEVR Board member Sally Atherton, Ph.D. for being selected by the ARVO Board of Trustees as the new Executive Director. Dr. Atherton has been a tireless advocate for medical research funding, and I know that she will inspire ARVO members to make their voices heard on Capitol Hill. I also want to acknowledge ARVO’s Chief Operating Officer Iris Rush, who has worked closely with NAEVR/AEVR Executive Director Jim Jorkasky during 2012 to ensure that ARVO has been engaged in all of the Alliances’ activities.

NEI has acted in an equally audacious manner, characterized most recently by its efforts with Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) to get $10 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 Vision Trauma Research Program (VTRP) funding despite the six-month Continuing Resolution (CR) that funds the government at the FY2012 level. NAEVR and BVA have been adamant that these eye injuries related to deployment in Afghanistan warrant special research funding. To make the case, AEVRS’s Decade of Vision 2010-2020 Initiative recently released at the Fifth Military Vision Symposium on Ocular and Vision Injury held by Schepens Eye Research Institute and Massachusetts Eye and Ear a Value of Defense-Related Vision Research brochure that details the importance of the VTRP in addressing Department of Defense (DOD)-identified research gaps. NAEVR is using the brochure in meetings with key Congressional leaders and in reaching out to the media.

At the Schepens meeting, DOD’s Telemedicine and Advanced Technology Research Center (TATRC) announced $14 million in awards to 21 investigators—significant funding during such tight fiscal times. Due to the quality and responsiveness of the grant proposals, TATRC is able to garner additional funding from “sister” DOD agencies to support many more grants than that possible with just the Congressionally appropriated amount. Those transfers are not guaranteed, however, so NAEVR advocates for the highest possible VTPR appropriation.

The AEVRS brochure joins the Silver Book: Vision Loss Volume II (released in March) and NAEVR’s first-ever Cost of Military Eye Injury and Blindness study (released in May)—reflecting more Alliance deliverables than in any other year. Depending on the outcome of the election, as well as potential Congressional action on the sequester, the Alliances may need to ratchet up the audacious factor even further to make the case for adequate funding for vision research.

NAEVR’s efforts are being recognized on Capitol Hill and within our own community. Since this is the last edition of the Report for 2012, I want to acknowledge that Jim will receive an Honorary Fellowship Award at the American Academy of Optometry Annual Meeting in Phoenix in late-October, and NAEVR will receive the Distinguished Service Award at the American Academy of Ophthalmology Annual Meeting in mid-November in Chicago.

As we approach 2013, I want to remind all of you that AEVRS will celebrate its 20th anniversary, and Jim is already planning a number of low cost/high impact events to recognize that milestone within the context of delivering the Alliances’ messages to Congress, the media, and the public about the value of federally funded vision research.

In late August, Jim, NAEVR’s David Epstein, and Iris met with National Eye Institute (NEI) Director Paul Sieving, M.D., Ph.D. and his senior team to review NEI’s priorities. I am pleased that Dr. Sieving commented that, despite funding challenges, NEI continues to fund research that moves vision science forward significantly. In that regard, he also spoke about the launch of NEI’s Challenge to Identify Audacious Goals in Vision Research and Blindness to stimulate innovation in establishing a national vision research agenda and how NAEVR and ARVO could promote this initiative to the community. NEI is using innovative new methods, such as prizes for challenge winners, to seek input from a variety of disciplines, including those not typically engaged in vision research. I look forward to NEI’s release of the most audacious goals at its February 24-26, 2013, meeting in the Washington, D.C. area.

NAEVR has been engaged in all of the Alliances’ activities to stimulate cost/high impact events to recognize that milestone within the context of delivering the Alliances’ messages to Congress, the media, and the public about the value of federally funded vision research.

The NEI’s Challenge to Identify Audacious Goals in Vision Research and Blindness is designed to encourage everyone to think about the future of vision research and to generate ideas for projects that will move vision science forward significantly.

The vision community’s continued financial support is more important than ever in this upcoming anniversary year, and I ask for your commitment when NAEVR and AEVRS issue the 2013 renewals in late November. I wish you all a happy and healthy holiday season.

Stephen J. Ryan, M.D.
President, NAEVR/AEVR Boards
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Contributor Report

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