President’s Message

With this edition of the Report, we begin a celebration of the 15th anniversary of AEVR and NAEVR as the educational and advocacy voices for eye and vision research funding. In 1993, the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO), the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO), and the Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology (AUPO) founded AEVR, a 501c(3) foundation, to educate Congress about the value of federally funded vision research being conducted by the National Eye Institute (NEI) within the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Shortly thereafter, NAEVR was formed as a 501c(4) “social welfare” organization under which the vision research community could focus its advocacy efforts. AEVR/NAEVR now represents more than 50 contributing organizations reflecting the breadth of our community.

Although recognizing its rich history, AEVR/NAEVR plans to focus this year’s anniversary celebration on the future, especially how past federal investment in the NEI is resulting in a continuous, dramatic stream of research findings changing the diagnosis and treatment of eye disease and saving and restoring vision.

NEI is accomplishing this, despite its funding challenges, due to its effective use of collaborations—within the NIH, with other Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) agencies, and with private funding organizations. We commend NEI Director Dr. Paul Sieving for his leadership in that regard—in concert with NIH Director Dr. Elias Zerhouni—and the stories in this edition exemplify those efforts, including that on the March 13-14 Glaucoma Endpoints Symposium in which the NEI collaborated with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to consider alternative endpoints for glaucoma clinical trials. This could have a major impact on new products for patients.

This meeting also reflects NAEVR’s leadership, as it ultimately emerged from a NAEVR/AAO-initiated meeting with FDA in July 2005 to address ophthalmic drug approval issues, reflecting an expertise in regulatory issues brought to NAEVR by Executive Director James Jorkasky. Under Jim’s leadership this past five years, NAEVR’s scope has grown to include advocacy for defense-related vision research funding (see story on back page), fostering collaborations in which NEI study results may facilitate patient access to new treatments and therapies, and extensive collaborations with coalition partners.

NAEVR’s focus will remain on NEI funding, as it serves primarily as the “Friends of the NEI.” Medical research faces an enormous challenge with the President’s Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 budget request that flat funds the NIH/NEI. Fortunately, medical research’s champions Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA), the respective Chair and Ranking Member of the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS) Appropriations Subcommittee, have once again led a strong bipartisan effort to increase FY2009 funding. House champions, led by Cong. Ed Markey (D-MA), also coordinated a bipartisan letter signed by 179 Members to House appropriations leaders urging an increase.

As always, I thank you for your commitment and support. AEVR/NAEVR will announce a number of events reflecting this anniversary year!

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