ARVO 2013 Annual Meeting in Seattle, Washington

Funding is the Talk of NAEVR Central

Due to its prominent location on the Skybridge between exhibit halls in the Washington State Convention Center, NAEVR Central was a convenient location for attendees to discuss funding—primarily final FY2013 NIH/NEI funding and that proposed for FY2014. The disappointing news that the post-sequester FY2013 NEI funding would be $662 million provided an incentive for researchers to contact their Members of Congress to request an improvement in the President’s proposed FY2014 budget, which plans no NEI budget growth—but replaces the sequester with other budget cuts and new revenue.

Vision Trauma Research is Funding Bright Spot

A capacity crowd attended NAEVR’s May 6 Defense-Related Vision Research Opportunities session, which focused on how researchers can be responsive to Department of Defense (DOD)-identified vision research gaps. This summer, the DOD’s Telemedicine and Advanced Technology Research Center (TATRC), which manages the Vision Trauma Research Program (VTRP), is expected to issue an announcement requesting grant submissions. In FY2013 Defense appropriations, the VTRP was funded at $10 million—the highest ever. Despite an eight percent sequester cut, it will yield at least $9.2 million in funding opportunities. Throughout the meeting, NAEVR added researchers to its “DOD Interest List” to notify when TATRC issues the funding announcement. To be added to the list, email depstein@eyeresearch.org.

NEI Director Dr. Sieving Updates the Audacious Goals Initiative

On Sunday, May 5, NEI Director Paul Sieving, M.D., Ph.D. updated a capacity crowd on the NEI Challenge to Identify Audacious Goals in Vision Research and Blinding Rehabilitation, a unique effort conducted under the America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-358) that sought new and compelling scientific ideas to advance vision research from a wide and diverse audience of researchers, engineers, and “citizen scientists.” Based on the ten winning ideas, NEI has developed the primary AG: Regenerating Neurons and Neural Connections in the Eye and Visual Systems, and identified two priority research areas: Molecular Therapy for Eye Disease and Intersection of Aging and Biological Mechanisms of Eye Disease. At the June 13 National Advisory Eye Council (NAEC) meeting, NEI presented an action plan in which an initial AG Development Group composed of NAEC members would convene expert workshops to identify priority first steps, anticipate challenges and roadblocks, and consider successful outcomes measures. NEI also proposes to form an independent Scientific Leadership Committee (SLC) with broad vision community representation and rotating membership to advise long-term.

The Seattle Times Reports on ARVO’s Veterans Vision and TBI Session

NAEVR assisted ARVO Trustee John Clark, Ph.D. (University of Washington) in planning ARVO’s first-ever Veterans Vision and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) session, held on Sunday, May 5. The session, which focused on research into the similarities between military blast TBI-related visual dysfunction and ocular pathology resulting from sports-related head injuries and age-related neurodegenerative diseases, was reported on by The Seattle Times.

Elaine Peskind, M.D. (University of Washington School of Medicine), a psychiatrist, noted that when she tested the vision of blast-exposed veterans, she noticed unusual movement patterns in their eyes. Dr. Kardon added that “trauma severe enough to damage the brain would also affect the eyes, so that vision/eye movement could be used as a means to diagnose brain damage.” Lee Goldstein, M.D., Ph.D. (Boston University School of Medicine) stated that “the lens is a very sensitive indicator for neurodegenerative diseases,” while Ann McKee, M.D. (Boston University School of Medicine), who has examined the brains from deceased veterans and athletes, stated that “there are few effective treatments for TBI, so eye scans could help change that by providing a way to tell whether a treatment or therapy is leading to improvements.”

NAEVR member Blinded Veterans Association (BVA), which invited local members to attend, was represented by Robert Mower and Randy Builder. NAEVR invited Congressional offices to have district staff attend, which included Kelly Goetz from the office of Cong. Dave Reichert (R-WA) and Brad Forbes from the office of Cong. Derek Kilmer (D-WA), a member of the House Armed Services Committee. ARVO has posted a video of the session at www.arvo.org.