ARVO Advocates Thank Congress For FY2016 Increases, Urge FY2017 Growth

ARVO Board President John Clark, Ph.D. (University of Washington) as well as two Members-In-Training (MIT) and seven Emerging Vision Scientists (EVSs)—early-stage investigators who have not yet received an R01 grant and were nominated by Departments of Ophthalmology and Schools/Colleges of Optometry from around the country.

The ARVO advocates were among the first to thank Congress for approving the FY2016 NIH and NEI appropriations increases and to comment on the President’s FY2017 budget request that had issued February 9 (see details inside). Since NAEVR had expressed disappointment in the President’s proposal to replace $1 billion in discretionary funding with politically sensitive mandatory funding, it prepared the advocates to emphasize the importance of growing the discretionary base, as well as raising the budget caps to facilitate funding for priority programs.

The MIT and EVS delegation, which reflected clinicians, clinician-scientists, and basic researchers dealing with a wide range of eye diseases, added greatly to ARVO’s message, stressing the impact that the combination of past cuts, flat funding, and lack of an inflationary increase at NEI has had on their training and career paths. In most visits, these advocates were speaking with contemporaries who may also have been examining their own career paths.

The NAEVR and AEVR Alliances have focused on the plight of early-stage investigators. On October 7, 2015, AEVR hosted the first-ever Emerging Vision Scientists Day on Capitol Hill in which these investigators displayed posters of their breakthrough research, with a NAEVR Advocacy Day following. The second annual EVS event is scheduled for September 14-15, 2016.

“The experience truly meant a lot to me, and I appreciated the opportunity to act as an agent of positive change for vision research, and the researchers and public we serve.”
—Mark Greiner, M.D. (University of Iowa).

The ARVO Members-in-Training (MIT) and Emerging Vision Scientists (EVSs) included from left: Tahreem Mir, M.D. (Johns Hopkins University/Wilmer Eye Institute), Priya Matthews, M.D. (Columbia University), Folami Powell, Ph.D. (Medical College of Georgia), Romulo Albuquerque, M.D., Ph.D. (University of Kentucky), Mark Greiner, M.D. (University of Iowa), Marco Ruggeri, Ph.D. (University of Miami/Bascom Palmer Eye Institute), Megan Collins, M.D. (Johns Hopkins University/Wilmer Eye Institute), Matthew van Hook, Ph.D. (University of Nebraska/Truhlsen Eye Institute), and Karl Wahlin, Ph.D. (University of California San Diego/Shiley Eye Institute).

On February 12, NAEVR managed for ARVO’s Annual Meeting Planning Committee an Advocacy Day that engaged 23 domestic and international advocates who visited 40 Congressional offices early in the FY2017 appropriations process. The group included representatives who are the Ranking Member of the Senate LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee and Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions HELP Committee, with appropriations and authorization jurisdiction over NIH, respectively.