

IN THE NEWS

ACADEMY NEWS Academy Fellows in the News

The WCO will present Paul E. Berman, OD, FAAO, with the International Optometrist of the Year award at the General Delegates Meeting in Ghana, Africa in April 2005. Dr. Berman is active with special needs populations, serving as Senior Clinical Advisor and Founder of Special Olympics Lions Clubs International Opening Eyes. Through this organization, he and a volunteer network of hundreds of optometrists provide proper eye care to Special Olympics athletes worldwide, and they help inform the public that people with mental retardation deserve the same quality vision care as all other patient populations.

The California Optometric Association at its December 3-4, 2004, House of Delegates named Academy Fellows, Melissa Barnett, OD, FAAO, and James E. Winnick, OD, FAAO, Diplomate, Cornea and Contact Lenses, *Young Optometrists of the Year for 2004*. Dr. Winnick participated in a mission to Poland through the Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity organization in 2002 and has spent the last two years assisting in the expansion of an optometry school in Poznan, Poland.

ORGANIZATION & INSTITUTION NEWS Gene Found to Increase Risk of the Most Common Cause of Blindness

On March 10, the National Eye Institute of NIH announced that scientists have identified a gene that is "strongly associated" with a person's risk for developing age-related macular degeneration (AMD). The finding was made by three independent teams, which include researchers with the National Eye Institute (NEI), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and other leading research centers. Detecting an AMD-associated gene may lead to early detection and new strategies for prevention and treatment for the debilitating eye disease. Papers by all three teams ap-

pear in a March 10, on-line issue of the journal *Science* (in *Science Express*).

AMD is a disease that blurs or destroys sharp, central vision. There is no known cure for AMD. Most scientists think the cause lies in an interplay of hereditary and environmental factors. It is the leading cause of blindness in people over age 60.

Family history of AMD is a risk factor for the disease. In recent years, eye researchers have been investigating certain portions of chromosomes to find AMD-associated genes. The new studies provide the strongest evidence yet of a specific gene association.

"The three studies are a significant step in AMD research. They confirm a strong genetic component of AMD, which may allow scientists to develop tests for the disease before symptoms begin to appear and when therapies might help slow its progress," said Paul A. Sieving, M.D., Ph.D., director of the National Eye Institute.

The three studies described in *Science* used different methods to screen the genomes from different groups of AMD patients. Yet all three studies came up with a commonly inherited variant of the same gene, called complement factor H (CFH). The CFH gene is responsible for a protein that helps regulate inflammation in part of the immune system that attacks diseased and damaged cells. In certain patients with AMD, inflammation in the eyes may trigger a biological process leading to the disease.

"This exciting work helps clarify how AMD develops and the relationship of the immune system with the disease. This could lead to entirely new approaches for therapeutics," said Emily Chew, M.D., deputy director, NEI Division of Epidemiology and Clinical Research, and collaborator on one of the studies.

Dr. Chew's team, headed by Josephine Hoh, Ph.D., Yale School of Public Health, New Haven, CT, found that people whose genetic make up includes a variant of the CFH gene are 7.4 times more likely to develop AMD. The study was based on whole genome analysis of participants

from the NEI-sponsored Age-Related Eye Disease Study, a major clinical study that closely followed nearly 5,000 patients with varying stages of AMD.

The team will next look at a larger number of patients and perhaps look at genetic differences between patients with the wet and dry forms of AMD. Wet AMD occurs when abnormal blood vessels behind the retina start to grow under the macula, a part of the central retina, where light is converted to nerve signals to the brain. Loss of central vision can be rapid. Dry AMD occurs when the light-sensitive cells in the macula slowly break down. Central vision can be lost gradually.

The second team, headed by Jonathan L. Haines, Ph.D., Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Nashville, identified the CFH gene by using high resolution mapping of a portion of a chromosome that had previously been associated with AMD in family studies.

A third research team, also funded by NEI, was headed by Albert O. Edwards, M.D., the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, Dallas.

OVS Editors note: Statements by individual researchers that a gene is linked to a disease unfortunately can turn out to be premature, with other scientists' being unable to replicate the findings. But this finding seems strong, in part because it was made independently by groups using somewhat different approaches.

Healthy Vision Month 2005

Healthy Vision Month 2005 is dedicated to raising awareness among people with low vision and their family, friends, and caregivers about the benefits of vision rehabilitation services. Visit the vision rehabilitation section on the Healthy Vision website: <http://www.healthyvision2010.org/rehabilitation/#orgs>. This site includes current resources on vision rehabilitation.

Antique Spectacles: Website Updated

The home page of <http://www.antiquespectacles.com/> is a non-commercial website developed by Massachusetts' ophthalmologist David A. Fleishman with the assistance of over 255 educators worldwide; 156 institutions are already participating. The site includes *slideshows*, *educational games*, and a *Guide to Assist in Identification* for museum curators and anyone wanting to date a relic or family heirloom. This website is dedicated to 22 people from eleven different countries who comprise an *Honor Roll of Distinguished Persons*.

Fleishman is the passionate curator of this online museum, made up of interesting historical items from both private and public collections around the world, including paintings and other works of art. The rich and colorful 750 year history of eyewear for the people of every continent is brought to life in an ever-expanding website that now has over 950 described and dated images on the website on the subject of Vision Aids.

Laser Institute of America (LIA) Announces New ANSI Standard

The new ANSI Z136.4 (2005) Recommended Practice for Laser Safety Measurements for Hazard Evaluation provides guidance for optical measurements associated with laser safety requirements. The information is intended to assist users who are entrusted with the responsibility of conducting laser hazard evaluations to ensure that appropriate control measures are implemented.

The recommended practice document contains clearly written definitions, exam-

ples, and other practical information for laser safety officers, technicians, medical practitioners, educators, and other professionals. The comprehensive guide represents years of effort by laser safety experts representing the Department of Defense, Department of Energy, the Food and Drug Administration, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, industrial laser manufacturers, laser operators, academic contributors, and others.

Visit www.laserinstitute.org/onlinestore for more information.

ACHIEVE Study Examines Impact of Vision Correction Choices on Children's Self-Perception and Long-Term Achievement Potential

The Ohio State University College of Optometry is currently conducting a three-year, multi-center, randomized clinical trial aptly titled The Adolescent and Child Health Initiative to Encourage Vision Empowerment (ACHIEVE) Study. The study is assessing the effect of glasses and contact lenses on the self-perception of myopic children ages 8 to 11 years, and examining how each vision correction choice influences children's academic and athletic competence, social acceptance, behavior, and overall self-perception. ACHIEVE builds upon the results of a pilot study that suggested that children ages 8 to 11 can wear contact lenses successfully and care for them independently. The study's protocol reflects input from a multi-disciplinary advisory panel of academicians and eye care professionals who work with children, including optometrists, pediatricians, and child psychologists. The 484 children

enrolled to date were randomly assigned to wear glasses or disposable soft contact lenses. Their self-perceptions will be assessed every six months, using a well-validated survey, the Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC). Additionally, the Pediatric Refractive Error Profile (PREP) survey was developed to compare the vision-specific quality of life between children wearing contact lenses and children wearing glasses throughout the entire study. The ACHIEVE study is supported by an educational grant from The Vision Care Institute of Johnson & Johnson Vision Care Inc.

INDUSTRY NEWS

CIBA Vision Joins with Upromise to Expand College Savings Opportunities to Families Nationwide

CIBA Vision announced that it has teamed up with Upromise Inc., the nation's largest non-governmental service helping families save for college. Upromise members can get 3 percent of the cost of the purchase price toward college at more than 20,000 grocery and drug stores in the U.S. when they buy CIBA Vision contact lens care products.

CIBA Vision Appoints New Leader to Global Specialty Lens Business

Erich Bauman, OD, FAAO, has been appointed vice president for the business responsible for marketing, new product development, customer service, and general business performance by CIBA Vision.