

Research!America Releases New *Vision and Blindness* Fact Sheet

In December, Research!America (RIA) and The Lasker Foundation released a new fact sheet on *Vision and Blindness*, developed in conjunction with NAEVR, which is the first-ever vision-related fact sheet within the RIA portfolio of position papers showcasing how investment in research saves lives and money—especially that sponsored by the NEI. The fact sheet accompanied the December RIA newsletter that also featured NAEVR as its “Member of the Month.”

The fact sheet’s official release on Capitol Hill and to the media will occur during a January 25, 2005, Capitol Hill reception to coincide with the start of the 109th Congress and the FY2006 budget/appropriations process. “We are pleased to have worked with RIA to expand the message about the value of eye and vision research,” stated NAEVR’s James Jorkasky, “as it adds another powerful resource to our advocacy efforts with the new Congress.”

The fact sheet is available at www.researchamerica.org and www.eyeresearch.org.



#16 in a series

Investment in research saves lives and money

facts about:

} Vision & Blindness

"If you think research is expensive, try disease."
— Mary Lasker 2001-2002

Today:

- 3.4 million Americans 40 and older are blind or have impaired vision that cannot be corrected by eyewear. The most common causes are macular degeneration, glaucoma, cataract and diabetic retinopathy.*
- Americans 80 and older are the fastest growing segment of our population and have the highest rate of blindness.**
- Latinos have higher rates of age-related visual impairment and blindness than other ethnic groups. Visual impairment often goes undetected in Latinos because of limited access to eye care services.**
- Glaucoma is a leading cause of blindness in African Americans. Half of glaucoma cases could be delayed or prevented with prostaglandin eye drops.***

SOURCE: NATIONAL EYE INSTITUTE, NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH NATIONAL EYE INSTITUTE RESEARCH TO PREVENT BLINDNESS (NATIONAL EYE INSTITUTE)
**U.S. SOURCE: PREVALENCE EQUALLY GROUP PROFILE BY DEMOGRAPHIC (2001)
***Mansueti, P. et al., "PROSTAGLANDIN EYE DROPS," 2001, 100-102

The Cost:

- In 2001, visual disorders and disabilities cost the U.S. \$48 billion.
- If a child becomes visually impaired, the additional costs for medical visits, home modifications and lost productivity are estimated at \$564,000 over the child's lifetime.*

SOURCE: RESEARCH!AMERICA, NATIONAL EYE INSTITUTE AND NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH (2001)

survivor

NAME: ZACHARY MCCARTHY

AGE: 3

DISEASE: RETINOPATHY OF PREMATURITY

Zachary McCarthy of Santa Clara, California, was born three months early in December 2000. Weighing just over two pounds, Zach was admitted to the neonatal intensive care unit where doctors treated him for complications, including retinopathy of prematurity (ROP). The blood vessels in his retina began to grow abnormally, which could have left Zach blind for life.

Dr. William Goot of the Smith-Kettlewell Eye Research Institute approached Zach's parents, Michele and Kevin, about participating in a National Eye Institute-funded study on ROP. Dr. Goot explained that he would use a laser to burn the edge of the retina to stop the abnormal blood vessel growth. "The description of the procedure made me so upset. It would take away part of Zach's peripheral vision, but the alternative was unthinkable. He could have gone blind," explains Michele.

In the study, Dr. Goot and other researchers discovered that treating high-risk cases of ROP no longer decreases the chance of needing glasses or going blind. Michele says, "Zach doesn't even require glasses now. We haven't assessed how much peripheral vision he has lost, but hopefully he will be able to compensate for any loss by turning his head a little."

The McCartys are thankful for the study and strongly support medical research. Michele says, "We served as Ambassadors for the local March of Dimes chapter because I felt that if I could encourage just one person to donate to research, I had made a difference. How do you help ailing people without research?"

SAVING LIVES
SAVING MONEY

HOW RESEARCH SAVES LIVES:

- Older drivers with cataracts are more likely to have automobile accidents. Cataract surgery cuts the number of crashes by these drivers in half.

SOURCE: HANCOCK, S. ET AL., "IMPACT OF THE AMERICAN-HEALTH ASSOCIATION (AHA) SURVEY ON ROAD"

HOW RESEARCH SAVES MONEY:

- Everyone with diabetes is at risk for developing diabetic retinopathy. NIH-funded researchers have developed treatments that delay or prevent diabetic retinopathy, saving the U.S. \$1.8 billion a year.
- Thirty years ago, cataracts were the leading cause of blindness in our nation. Research led to new surgical and material technologies that reduced complications and improved recovery time without increasing costs. Economists estimate that cataract surgery provided Americans over \$200 billion in benefits in 2003 alone.*

SOURCE: *MANSUETI, P. ET AL. AND NATIONAL EYE INSTITUTE (2001), 100-102