

NAEVR and AEVR Cite NEI Study on Protective Effect of Omega-3 Fatty Acids in Hill Advocacy and Education

In late June, NAEVR hand-delivered letters to all House and Senate appropriators citing a just-released NEI-funded study, published in *Nature Medicine*, which demonstrates the protective effect of omega-3 polyunsaturated acids against retinopathy in mice as an example of the types of groundbreaking research that must be adequately funded in FY2008. NAEVR wrote: "NEI is investigating low-cost and widely available nutrient-based treatment approaches to retinal disease such as Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP) in infants, diabetic retinopathy, and AMD. This emphasis on disease preemption/prevention is a hallmark of the 21st century paradigm for research within the NIH, as described by Director Dr. Elias Zerhouni. With research ranging

from ROP in premature infants to AMD in seniors, the NEI affects and benefits Americans at all stages in life, ensuring productivity, independence, and quality of life."

On June 28, AEVR sponsored a *Children's Vision Research* Congressional Briefing. James Jorkasky's introductory comments stressed that NEI's research exemplifies NIH's larger goals for research—that which is collaborative (engaging ophthalmic and optometric researchers, as well as various NIH Institutes), community-based, and enrolls multi-ethnic patients. These comments were subsequently developed as a one-page *Characteristics of NEI Research* that was distributed on Capitol Hill.

Researchers Awarded \$4.8 Million for Defense-related Vision Research

In early July, the Department of Defense's (DOD) Peer-Reviewed Medical Research Program (PRMRP) finalized its awards from the FY2006 appropriations process, and five researchers received a total of \$4.8 million. These researchers included Balamurali Ambati, M.D. (Medical College of Georgia), Michelle Callegan, Ph.D. (University of Oklahoma), Lu Chen, Ph.D. (Schepens Eye Research Institute), Shelley Fried, Ph.D. (Harvard Medical School), and Joseph Rizzo III, M.D. (Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary), and their awards reflect 10 ten percent of the \$50 million pool of funds in this program. The PRMRP program was not funded in the FY2007 appropriations process.

In its advocacy, NAEVR is urging that FY2008 defense appropriations retain the eligibility of eye and vision research for PRMRP funding since 16 percent of

Iraq war injuries involve vision, usually traumatic eye injury. On July 10, NAEVR President Dr. Stephen Ryan delivered to defense-related vision research champions Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) and Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA) letters from ophthalmology chairs and optometry deans in those states in support of vision research's continued eligibility.

"The responsiveness of the vision community to this new and additional source of funding was dramatic," said NAEVR's James Jorkasky, who added that 52 of all 651 grants submitted for PRMRP funding, or eight percent, came from this community. He noted that, if successful in retaining eligibility in FY2008, NAEVR will work in future years for a direct earmark that would obviate competition for funds with the 28 other areas of research within the PRMRP.



Lynn Cyert, Ph.D., O.D. (Northeastern University/Oklahoma College of Optometry) spoke about the NEI-funded *Vision in Preschoolers (VIP) Study*. She was joined by Cong. Gene Green (D-TX), co-chair of the Congressional Vision Caucus, who attended the event.



Michael Repka, M.D., (Wilmer Eye Institute/ Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine) spoke about the *Pediatric Eye Disease Investigator Group (PEDIG)*, which he co-chairs. Dr. Repka also discussed ROP and the recent NEI basic research on the protective effect of omega-3 fatty acids against retinal disease that will be translated into clinical practice in a follow-up study in premature infants, to be conducted at Children's Hospital Boston.



Dr. Stephen Ryan and James Jorkasky with Kevin Kane (center), an Iraq war veteran handling defense issues in the office of Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX)