



Gift of **SIGHT**
Registered Charity No 295753

**NEWSLETTER
AUTUMN
2008**

Dear Supporters,

As I read through this newsletter I am once again overwhelmed by the help we have had from so many people. As you can see Bill and Graham went to tremendous lengths cycling 800 miles for Gift of Sight while others have given of their time and talents closer to home in Hampshire. The results of all these efforts is that we can move forward much more quickly with our research. We particularly need to do this at this time because of the progress we are making and work solely originating in our laboratory has recently resulted in the identification of a major new gene for age related macular degeneration!

We have subsequently replicated our exciting findings in a cohort of patients affected with macular degeneration in America. The same significance was found in this second set of patients demonstrating that our finding is not a statistical fluke but rather a gene important to macular degeneration around the world. This work is therefore a major step forward in understanding this very common cause of blindness. I am very proud that our laboratory in Hampshire has made this important contribution to understanding this disease. We now need to understand this gene's function so we can devise novel drug therapies based on this new insight. That is where the Gift of Sight appeal is so important. It facilitates this work by providing rapid access to funding to allow this research to continue. Thank you to all of you who help. This finding demonstrates that we are on the right track and that your money is being put to good use.

Best wishes,

Prof. Andrew Lotery



A break in training at the Southampton Eye Unit

Bill and Graham **CYCLING THE ROUTE OF THE RHINE FOR GIFT OF SIGHT**



Supported by members of
Rotary Club of Romsey Test



Smiles of relief upon reaching the final destination

Bill and Graham, who has suffered with macular degeneration since his late teens, teamed together with his fellow Rotarian Graham Lee to cycle almost 800 miles by tandem down the route of the Rhine to raise funds on our behalf. It is anticipated that the trip has raised in excess of £4,000.

The first day of cycling was bitterly cold and Graham, who was on the front of the tandem, had to put plastic bags on his hands in an attempt to keep warm. It was an epic journey which included having to buy a new tyre at enormous expense, taking a canal trip whilst the tandem was out of action due to a broken frame and frequent moments of a "where are we?" nature. This was probably due to the fact that the Ordnance Survey are not involved with map making in Europe! Reading the diary of the trip at least the lodgings were comfortable, refreshment available and many locals helped out with directions when required as well as providing moral support.

A group of Rotarians joined Bill and Chris for the last three days' cycling which gave them a well deserved boost. We would like to thank Bill, Graham, all the Rotarians who helped in so many ways, as well as Gemma Gidley who up to date by posting details of the journey on the internet.

Congratulations to all involved and thank you for this tremendous boost to our funds.

HEARTFELT THANKS TO



Chichester Lions

A fantastic cheque for £2000 was presented to Professor Lotery by Tony Harrison and Sue Boucher of Chichester Lions Club. The money is raised from the recycling of spectacles which are collected in bins in opticians and doctors surgeries all over the UK. Spectacles which can be reused are sent to developing countries and those with gold or metal rims are recycled by melting them down to reclaim the metals.

Tony Harrison, President of Chichester Lions Club, and Lion Sue Boucher with Prof. Andrew Lotery

Chichester Lions are sponsoring a competition for budding journalists with a theme of 'Saving Sight'. There are four age categories and the winner in each category will receive a £400 bursary and the runner up a £200 bursary to donate to a sight related charity and Gift of Sight is on the list. Please encourage your young relatives to enter.

For further information about the recycling of spectacles, how you can help and to obtain further details of the competition please check out the Chichester Lions website at www.chilions.org.uk

Car Boot Team

Prof Andrew Lotery and Dr. Martin Mitchell acted as money collectors at the Car Boot Sale in Winchester on a lovely, sunny Sunday in July. The site was filled to capacity and was closed to incoming vehicles at 8.15am. Five more supporters provided back up and, as well as handing out Newsletters and our new Gift of Sight balloons, we managed to raise £1055.

Many thanks to all of you who brought your vehicles in to support us and to our fantastic team for their considerable efforts on the day.



Prof Andrew Lotery and Bill Organ (Chairman of the Gift of Sight Board) in discussion!



John Symes and Ian Corrie Hill

All supporters who have given freely of their time

We are lucky to have such loyal supporters. Many generous cheques have been received since the last Newsletter and some of you have made use of your homes and gardens to raise money for Gift of Sight. Events always take a considerable amount of time to organise ahead, as well as the commitment on the day. We are very grateful for the hard work that you undertake for us.

GOOD NEWS - THREE NEW PhD Students from September 2008

Xiaoli Chen has worked in the Gift of Sight laboratory for the past 2½ years as a Research Technician and has now achieved funding to enable her to continue her work as a PhD student. Her project will be entitled "Characterisation of Adult Ocular Stem Cells and their use in Regenerative Medicine". It will be carried out with the aim of harnessing adult stem cells for the treatment of degenerative eye diseases such as Age-related Macular Degeneration. Part of this project will utilise bio-degradable polymers. These polymers will be injected into the eye and will create a scaffold for stem cells to grow, survive and integrate into the eye. We are, therefore, delighted that we have also been able to appoint Andrew Treharne from the Southampton University Chemistry Department. Andrew will be jointly supervised by Dr Martin Grossel in the Chemistry Department and Prof Lotery in the Research Laboratory. His research will complement Xiaoli's as he works to develop the best polymers to protect the stem cells that Xiaoli will be using. This is an exciting partnership between the School of Medicine and the School of Chemistry at the University of Southampton.

Sam Khandhadia who is a clinical ophthalmologist will be evaluating whether liver transplants may actually protect against macular degeneration! This follows on from recent advances where we now realise that one of the key proteins responsible for macular degeneration is predominantly made by the liver. His project will involve both laboratory work and working with liver transplant patients across the country. This project emphasises the value of having clinician scientists who can work in both the clinic and the laboratory.

WORKING WITH US



Dr Catherine Jomary

Catherine obtained her Masters degree in Molecular Biology of Membranes and Cellular Interactions from the University of Paris VII in 1984. Her PhD thesis of 1987 in Molecular Pharmacology involved designing and developing new analgesic drugs to study the relationship between pain and the opioid system in the central nervous system. She has since held a series of post-doctoral positions which have encompassed several neuroscience disciplines.

Dr Catherine Jomary

At the Montreal Neurological Institute, at McGill University in Canada, she studied neuroanatomy and electron microscopy. She extended her training to molecular biology, first in the School of Medicine at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore USA where she analysed the expression of opioid peptides in the brain, and then in the School of Medicine at The University of Texas, Houston, where she investigated the expression cloning of somatostatin receptors. From 1992 to 2007 she was a Senior Research Fellow in the Retinitis Pigmentosa Research Unit, at St Thomas' Hospital, London, where in association with Dr. Steve Jones, she had established research programmes focusing on investigating the molecular and cellular mechanisms associated with progressive photoreceptor cell death in retinitis pigmentosa and similar retinal dystrophies, and on developing gene and stem cell therapies. Most recently she has joined Professor Lotery in the Gift of Sight laboratory to develop broadly applicable stem cell-based therapeutic strategies to treat any form of severe blinding diseases due to retinal degeneration.



Genetic Epidemiology of Eye Diseases

Sarah Ennis graduated with first class honours after studying Biochemistry at the National University of Ireland, Galway. She then joined the Genetic Epidemiology & Bioinformatic Research Group at the University of Southampton in 1998 and completed her PhD in 2003 following studies in the genetic epidemiology of the Fragile X region. In 2006, she was awarded the School of Medicine Postdoctoral Career Track Award and in 2007 was appointed lecturer in Cell and Molecular Biology.

Dr Sarah Ennis

Sarah's research within the field of genetic epidemiology is wide ranging and over the years she has published on various topics including: linkage mapping within pedigrees; chromosomal non-disjunction and translocation; longitudinal cohort studies; analyses of risk and survival for various genetic predispositions/diseases; dynamic mutation and chromosomal instability; methodology and application of linkage disequilibrium mapping techniques. Such statistical and bioinformatic analyses have been applied to a number of clinical areas including mental retardation, breast cancer, leprosy, epilepsy and asthma. Within the field of ocular genetics she has contributed to grant applications and journal publications on congenital nystagmus, retinitis pigmentosa, age-related macular degeneration and primary open angle glaucoma.

This branching into ophthalmology began in 2005 when a genome-wide association study of age-related macular degeneration (AMD) was published. Josephine Hoh *et al*/ from Yale University reported a significant breakthrough in understanding this disease when they published their finding of the CFH gene. At that time, Sarah was working on an NIH grant developing methods for gene mapping technology using genome-wide data. A collaboration with the Yale group initiated Sarah's research into ophthalmic genetics and led to a local collaboration with Professor Andrew Lotery. Over this short period of time, this local collaboration has resulted in a growing number of research publications and successful grant applications including a prestigious international grant from the Macular Vision Research Foundation. The ongoing success of this collaboration between Sarah and Andrew Lotery's Eye Laboratory is to be highlighted over the coming weeks when a major finding pertaining to the genetics of AMD is to be published in a high profile international journal.

WILLS

If you are considering leaving a legacy to Gift of Sight in your Will please be assured that any gift made to the charity is free of tax. It is very helpful for us to be made aware of your intentions although we do not need to know the sum involved.

Please accept this very public 'thank you' if you are one of the kind people who have advised us that you have remembered us when making your Will.

GIFT OF SIGHT BALL

The Pavilion Marquee, Romsey
Tickets £55 Black Tie

20th September 2008
(Rear of The Cromwell Arms)
Auction, raffle and prize balloons

Prizes so far this year include:

An afternoon in the Draper Tools Hospitality Box for four people at St. Mary's Football Stadium

Four tickets for a day's cricket at The Rose Bowl in 2009 (to include car parking)

A collection of Simply Red/Mick Hucknall CD's and DVD's with Stars Collectors Edition Booklet signed by Mick Hucknall. A pennant signed by the Arsenal football team with an authentication certificate and many more - vouchers for meals, beauty treatments, one month's free membership to a Fitness Club, free passes to Leisure activities and bottles of alcohol.

ARE YOU ABLE TO DONATE A PRIZE FOR ONE OF OUR SCHEMES?

To order tickets and to discuss donating prizes please use the contact details at the bottom of the page

NEWSLETTERS

Following conversations with many visually disabled supporters we have been working on various ways that we can get our news to you in the best possible manner.

We shall continue issuing Newsletters by post but are also able to offer them on line (please see www.giftofsight.org.uk), by e-mail or in audio tape or CD form which will be set up for us by the Talking Echo. A form is enclosed for completion for those of you who would like to alter the way that you receive your Gift of Sight news. If we do not have any response a hard copy Newsletter will continue to be sent to you.

A box is also included to amend any details that we have wrong or that may have changed due to house moves etc. You may also decide that you would rather not receive the Newsletter which, if we know, will save unnecessary postage.

Many thanks to ExxonMobil at the Fawley Refinery for sponsoring our 2008 Newsletters

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