

*Funding world-class vision research*

Dear Friends and Supporters

It is with great sadness that I share the news of the death of Juliette Spiller. She joined the Gift of Sight Advisory Board in 2009 and was immediately involved in suggesting fundraising initiatives, including two jazz events in her own garden. Juliette provided the impetus for the Gift of Sight Carol Concert and her clarity of thought, determination and Yorkshire common sense made her an important member of the Committee. She steered the SSAFA (The Armed Forces Charity) Carol Service at the Guards Chapel in London to impressive fundraising heights and had served on other charities for which she received national recognition. Our sympathy goes to Bill, her totally supportive husband, and to her family.



Members of our research team have attended various conferences and meetings over the summer, sharing details of our work and hearing about vision science research taking place worldwide. This participation enables us to keep abreast of the latest scientific developments. Our work is, of course, vastly helped by philanthropy donations coming through Gift of Sight. I humbly acknowledge the huge help that has been received through generous legacies this year which have enabled us to purchase state-of-the-art imaging equipment and to commit to future studies with confidence that we have funding in place to carry them through.

The imaging equipment has enabled Southampton to be the leading clinical site in a drug trial of the first novel treatment for dry age related macular degeneration (AMD). This is testing a drug which can inhibit a process called 'complement activation'. As well as leading this study in the United Kingdom we also recruited the highest number of patients within the UK. In approximately a year's time trial results will identify if this is an effective new therapy for this devastating disease. I am particularly pleased that this drug was developed because of our work and that of our international collaborators which has shown the importance of complement in causing the development of AMD. This result demonstrates the importance of basic science to first understand a disease and then to use novel insights to develop a new therapy.

We have published 13 papers so far this year, more than 1 research paper per month. To put this in perspective some researchers struggle to produce 1 paper a year which is the minimum government requirement. Our published work has identified, amongst other things, how rare genetic diseases can mimic age related macular degeneration; the best way to treat wet AMD to get the best results for patients and, in collaboration, the successful long term results of gene therapy for choroideremia.

I was invited earlier this year to be one of the main speakers at the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists annual meeting in Dunedin, New Zealand. Why? Because our work is seen to be of international importance. A large part of our success is the support that the Gift of Sight Appeal gives us to enable us to move forward quickly with our research.

Thank you as always for your help .



Andrew Lotery

Professor of Ophthalmology

## RESEARCH

Congratulations to Dr Arjuna Ratnayaka on the publication of a paper in Experimental Eye Research. His work describes how the Amyloid beta protein, which is known to collect in eyes of AMD patients, can damage cells in the neuroretina. These findings provide us with new insights into the many ways in which the aging retina becomes damaged, leading to complex conditions such as AMD. Further details can be found on Arjuna's staff page on the University of Southampton website.

### **An update on children's research by Mr Jay Self**

Members of the clinical and research teams from University Hospital Southampton attended the annual BIPOSA (British Isles Paediatric Ophthalmology & Strabismus Association) which was held in Dublin at the beginning of October. Members of the Association are committed to enhancing the care of children with eye and vision problems and adults with eye movement and alignment difficulties. The participants include surgeons and orthoptists who specialise in children's eye care and adult strabismus surgery. Our group provided the largest number of talks and presentations by a single research centre and this is attributed to the growth in paediatric eye research and clinical care in Southampton.

The children's eye research team has gone from strength to strength and now includes: 4 PhD students, 1 research technician, 2 research orthoptists. We are also collaborating with teams in Pakistan, Exeter, Plymouth, London and Portsmouth. The team have presented over 10 talks and posters this year and published 4 papers in peer reviewed journals with 4 more in submission. Over 80 patients have been diagnosed with uncommon eye conditions through cutting-edge genetic testing and novel clinical tools. We are translating these discoveries into diagnostic tests and gene specific treatments for nystagmus and albinism. Thank you for your donations and outstanding support which enables us to move our work forward .

### **Chelsea Norman—PhD student**

Chelsea is a graduate with a Master of Biomedical Sciences degree from the University of Southampton and is just completing her first year as a PhD student studying congenital (inherited) nystagmus in Mr Jay Self's laboratory. Her doctoral project is to investigate the genetic cause of nystagmus using DNA samples from a large cohort of patients. Chelsea has been using numerous sequencing techniques to analyse patient DNA to search for inherited mutations that could have a role in causing nystagmus.



A comparison between people's genomes naturally reveals many variations and a large cohort of affected people enables the identification of the more pertinent mutations over those that are benign. As mutations are found Chelsea will go on to investigate them further by studying how they may affect development of the eye and thus cause nystagmus. A greater understanding of the genetic cause of nystagmus will enable faster diagnosis as well as direct future studies into treatments for patients.

Chelsea is enjoying the start of her career in academia and is pleased to be able to increase her expertise in the field of genetics and apply it to such a large cohort of patients. The project will also provide her with an invaluable skill-set in both laboratory based science and computational analysis of data. We shall look forward to following her research and take this opportunity to thank Chelsea and fellow student Ellie Keeling for their tremendous help at fundraising events.

## THANK YOU

We have experienced a fabulous rise in the number of people fundraising on our behalf as well as an increase in regular Direct Debit and payroll giving, which is obviously very much appreciated. Monies received in lieu of flowers following the loss of loved ones and legacy gifts have enabled us to support more scientific projects. Thank you all so much for your generous help.

Professor Andrew Lotery and four colleagues succeeded in abseiling from the Spinnaker Tower on the 19 June—it was a long way down! It was nerve racking to watch and undoubtedly a challenge for most of the team. There is always one person who bucks the trend and Pete Dobson obviously enjoyed the experience and manoeuvred his way down the Tower with great ease! The total raised by the team amounted to £3092.50 and thanks to everyone who sponsored the team, helping them raise such a great sum.



Abseil Team 2016

Thanks to Andrew and Helen Lotery for suggesting friends and family make donations to Gift of Sight in lieu of presents celebrating their joint 'big' birthdays at a party in June. An amazing £1718 was raised and I know you will all join me in congratulating them both and wishing them many happy returns.

Congratulations to Virginia Graham, a Director at Specsavers Romsey, who completed her Half Iron Man challenge in 5hrs 51mins, coming second in her category! A fabulous £960 raised to date!

Our love of Lymington continues with £1983 being raised by the pupils at Priestlands School. A record sum for their academic year and an amazing result for the pupils and ourselves. As part of the Community Matters Scheme shoppers at Waitrose, Lymington raised a fabulous £525. Jay and Ailsa joined the team at Specsavers in the town at the opening of their enlarged store and received a cheque for £350 to support our research. A talk to the Friends of Wistaria Surgery provided an update on our research. Great feedback was received and ideas for further fundraising events!



Ringwood Pedal Car Grand Prix

Jane Hannifan, who has been receiving treatment for the last five years for 'wet' AMD, has been spending an energetic year organising fundraising initiatives. Her niece has roller-skated laps around Goodwood and friends, Jackie and Rob York, organised a ladies team to race in the Ringwood Pedal Car Grand Prix. Ellie and Chelsea came along in their eyeball costumes and we had great fun supporting the team. Jane and her husband held a Ball at their house in the evening and were joined by many friends and neighbours who energetically supported Jane's 'mad' money making schemes. £4712 has been raised to date with another event taking place in November and we shall look forward to helping Jane reach her target of £5000.

Mrs Ann Saunders, who is always finding ways to help us, invited friends to join her at Kimpton House near Petersfield for coffee and a garden tour in July. We would like to thank Mr and Mrs Napier for allowing us the use of their beautiful garden and to thank Ann for raising the fabulous sum of £1300.

Thanks to the Church of the Ascension Ladies Group, Bitterne Park who raised £400 for us as their Charity of the Year. Your support is greatly appreciated.

We would also like to send our grateful thanks to Dr Philly Sargent and her committee who have been organising our forthcoming Christmas Concert in Romsey Abbey. The music will be provided by Aurum Vocale and we are delighted that Mr John Rutter will conduct three of his most famous Christmas pieces. Bruce Parker the journalist and television presenter will also speak at the Concert and we look forward to another fabulous event. Details of how to buy tickets are given on the Events page of this Newsletter. We know that tickets have been selling well and apologise to anyone who may not be able to buy the seat of their choice.

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

20 December	Gift of Sight Carol Concert in Romsey Abbey . Tickets can be purchased through Music in Romsey <a href="http://www.musicinromsey.ticketsource.co.uk">www.musicinromsey.ticketsource.co.uk</a> or Romsey Tourist Information Centre, 13 Church Street, Romsey, Tel: 01794 512987. Tickets are priced at £35, £30 and £25 .
27 October – 17 December	Winchester Charity Card Market in the Guildhall Winchester. Over 50 charities are represented and 100% of the profits on the cards comes directly back to the charities. We are unable to sell directly from our office so please do pop into Winchester if you have time. The Card Market is open from 10am-4pm, Monday to Saturday.
<b>2017</b> 23 April	Southampton ABP Half Marathon. Please do sign up and run for us. ‘Team Lotery’ have already signed up (more details in the next Newsletter) but please make a note of the website <a href="http://www.abpsouthamptonhalf.co.uk/">http://www.abpsouthamptonhalf.co.uk/</a> and help us to raise more money on St. Georges Day!
26 April	Bi-annual Gift of Sight Lecture : Venue and times to be confirmed.
21 May	Gift of Sight Skydive at Old Sarum. Four brave people have places signed up. Please contact us using the details below if you'd like to join the team .
9 July	A team will be entered in the Ringwood Pedal Car Grand Prix (to be held in New Milton in 2017) and we will give details of the event in a future newsletter.
8 October	Annual Rotary Romsey Test Way Walk. Interest has been expressed and it would be a great opportunity to field a Gift of Sight team after quite a lengthy break. Please do let us know if you would like to sign up. Details below!

We are very grateful to all of you who raise funds for us through organising events or making us your charity of the year. THANK YOU from all of us.

**Contact details** : Ailsa Walter,  
Gift of Sight, Development Office,  
University of Southampton,  
Highfield, Southampton SO17 1BJ

**Tel: 023 8059 9073**

**[www.giftofsight.org.uk](http://www.giftofsight.org.uk)**

**E-mail: [info@giftofsight.org.uk](mailto:info@giftofsight.org.uk)**

Supported by

**ExxonMobil**



Our continuing grateful thanks to ExxonMobil for kindly sponsoring printing costs of our Newsletters

Please let us know if you no longer wish to receive our Newsletters.