

'Beating Blindness'

Dear friends and supporters

Another year has flown by. I am delighted with the breadth of research studies being undertaken in Southampton. Working with colleagues across Europe our team has recently been awarded a €5 million grant from the European Union to test a new treatment for Stargardt disease. This is the most common cause of macular degeneration in the young and I am very excited that we will soon be able to offer our Stargardt patients access to this potential new treatment.



I was delighted to hear recently that Dr Helena Lee has succeeded in being awarded a clinical investigator grant from the Medical Research Council. This is an extremely prestigious award of over £1 million. Helena has been supported by Gift of Sight as an academic lecturer and was able to generate her essential preliminary data to secure this grant using research equipment bought by Gift of Sight. This means she can perform ground breaking research, which will hopefully help children affected by albinism, and the secured funding will allow her to transfer from an academic trainee to an independent researcher. This is a tremendous achievement for Helena but also demonstrates the value of the Gift of Sight Appeal in progressing research.

Gift of Sight has also been funding the staff needed to establish a donor eye biobank in Southampton for research purposes. This would allow us to look at the changes caused to cells in the eye when disease is present. Healthy eyes will be needed for control purposes. We are currently moving through all the essential processes that need to be undertaken and will post details of this much-needed resource on the Gift of Sight website very shortly.

The call on resources at Southampton Eye Unit remains heavy and is increasing year on year. In an effort to reduce pressure at the Eye Unit a mobile medical retina clinic has been launched. A partnership between University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust and pharmaceutical company Bayer will enable patients to receive eye injections in the community. It is staffed by members of Southampton Eye Unit, which will be reassuring to patients. We are always looking for innovative ways to reach patients and this is one such example.

I hope these snippets demonstrate the value of the Gift of Sight appeal in our quest to beat blindness. Please accept my heartfelt thanks for your continuing support and interest. I take this opportunity to wish you a belated but happy and healthy 2018.

With best wishes,



Andrew Lotery MD, FRCOphth
Professor of Ophthalmology

RESEARCH NEWS

Mr Parwez Hossain : Corneal research

Our corneal research team at the University of Southampton has been growing over the past five years and one of our projects has been to focus on diagnosing and treating corneal infections. There are around 6,000 cases of corneal infections diagnosed in the UK every year. These infections occur when the cornea is damaged by a foreign object and through the growth of bacteria and other micro-organisms, with around a third related to contact lens wear. Visual impairment is often very rapid (within 24 hours) and frequently leads to permanent visual loss.



Conventional testing methods for corneal infections can take anywhere between 48 hours and two weeks to provide results. I have been working with experts in electronic engineering and molecular microbiology at the University of Southampton, developing a micro-chip to analyse bacteria extracted from laboratory-infected tissue samples from the eye retrieval and corneal transplant service at University Hospital Southampton. Measuring the electrical properties of single bacteria as they pass one by one between tiny electrodes at high speed can identify instantly that an infection is present and distinguish between different bacteria such as E.coli and pseudomonas – something not possible using existing techniques. This has led to a prototype device which is approved by the Health Research Authority and Research Ethics Service for pilot study of patients presenting with corneal infections at Southampton Eye Unit. These findings, although currently laboratory-based, could have deep implications for the detection and treatment of corneal infections as it has the potential to reduce diagnosis time from up to two weeks to only a few minutes – and the ability to deliver the correct antibiotics immediately. The initial study is now underway and will involve thirty patients. We are hopeful for good results.

Mr Jay Self : Children's Research News and a plea for help

To celebrate the 300th anniversary of Freemasonry, The Masonic Charitable Foundation distributed £3m between 300 charities across the country and your votes resulted in the generous sum of £6000 being received for children's eye research in Southampton. I will look forward to reporting on how the funds have been used in our next Newsletter.



Children's eye problems come in many forms, ranging from disorders affecting the growth of the eye as a whole through specific retinal diseases to complex neurological eye movement problems. Many are congenital (present from birth), many are associated with problems in other parts of the body and most are poorly understood. Our paediatric vision research in Southampton is looking at very basic science through to clinical trials. This is considered very rare in children's eye research. The importance of our work was illustrated by my guest appearance on the Alan Titchmarsh television programme *'Love Your Garden'*, which featured one of my five year old blind patients.

Our team are keen to understand why Albinism and Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) have never been seen in the same patient. We would like to see if we can identify the reason for this anomaly. If you are over 60 with Albinism and would like to help with our study, please email j.e.self@soton.ac.uk giving your name, post code and date of birth. If you have any difficulty with this please contact Ailsa at the Gift of Sight Office for assistance.

We were sorry to learn of the death in August 2017 of William (Bill) Organ who led the Gift of Sight Board as Chairman for many years. Bill was a patient in Southampton Eye Unit and received treatment for age-related macular degeneration. He was very aware of the importance of vision research, was a tremendous ambassador for our cause and will be sadly missed.

Thank you for your donations in memory of friends and relations who died in 2017 including

Mr Richard Adams	Mrs Marie-Luise Baker	Mr David Barnes	Mrs Maisie Brickell
Mrs Jean Burgess	Mr Edwin Cook	Mrs Susan Corcoran	Mrs Gladys Dagg
Mrs Betty Freeston	Mrs Kathleen Gale	Mr Ronald Hawkins	Mrs Barbara Herald
Mrs Ellen Jones	Mr James McGrand	Mrs Nancy Mitchell	Mr Bill Organ
Mrs Mavis Rachel	Mrs Ruth Strongman	Mr Osborne Wain	Mrs Edna Waters
Mrs Mary Whitson			

THANK YOU

Once again we have to thank so many people for their generosity of spirit and kindness in helping us raise funds for our vision science research. We hosted a small tea party in September for Direct Debit donors and also some friends who consistently go out of their way to raise funds to support our research. We are very grateful for your ongoing help.

Our regular fundraiser Greta Paxton held a coffee morning in October 2017, including a raffle and a 'bring and buy' stall. As usual her friends all rallied round, the house was full and this really enjoyable morning raised a fabulous £1556 for children's eye research.



Specsavers, Romsey team

The 8 October saw a team striding out from St. Mary Bourne at the start of the annual Rotary Test Way Walk, heading towards Romsey Memorial Park. This included our regular supporter Jane Hannifan, with her son and some of her friends, Marian Hedley-Lewis from the Eye Unit, Ailsa with her daughter and four legged mascot Agnes, and a team from Specsavers, Romsey. The weather was dry, 25.5 miles was a good distance to walk and everyone kept up a cracking pace. Sarah Saunders-Davies walked eleven miles on her first sponsored event and between us we raised in excess of £2500. We would like to express our thanks to the Rotary Club of Romsey Test for holding this popular annual event.

Vickie Lush raised an amazing £2100 by organising a Quiz Night at Shawford Village Hall at the end of October. Family and friends worked as a team to help make the evening a huge success enjoying a ploughmans supper and a raffle, as well as exercising their skills on questions put to them by a team of three quizmasters. Vickie also made a fabulous Christmas cake to raffle which raised a further £110.

Rodney and Jenny Mansbridge held a firework evening in November, inviting their friends including many Freemasonry colleagues. Ailsa was delighted to attend a Christmas Carol evening in Chandlers Ford in December to receive two cheques, each for £455, from the Freemasons of Kings Court Lodge 8441 and Norman Court Lodge 4127. Thank you all for your generous ongoing support and for a great evening!

THANK YOU continued..

Grateful thanks to Dr Philly Sargent and her wonderful Event Committee for organising another hugely successful Concert in Romsey Abbey on the 15 December 2017. The evening was attended by the Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire and approximately 500 guests, who were treated to a wonderful programme of music. The composer and conductor Alexander L'Estrange gave a talk and conducted some of his pieces and author Bill Bryson gave a reading from Thomas Hardy's novel 'Under the Greenwood Tree'. Many thanks also to Bruce Parker MBE for joining us and hosting the evening on our behalf.

Professor Lotery explained in his talk how Gift of Sight funding has been vital in expanding vision science research in the University of Southampton by purchasing imaging equipment, supporting salaries and giving leverage to large grant applications. The 2018 Concert will be held on Tuesday the 18th December.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

PLEASE HOLD THE DATE!!

9 June 2018 the next Gift of Sight Ball will take place at the Ageas Bowl, Botley Road, Southampton SO30 3XH. Full details on the Gift of Sight Website under 'Events'
Tickets : £60 to include a welcome drink, a three course meal, wine on the table and dancing to the band **INNERVISION** : www.innervisioninfo.co.uk

22 April	Southampton ABP Marathon and Half Marathon. James Bidwell is running the Marathon in memory of his Grandmother Elizabeth Bald. Professor Lotery and his family will run the half marathon and will be joined by Christos Katsogiannis, the latter running for children's eye research. Their fundraising pages will be added to our 'Events' web page in due course.
21 July	Gung Ho Southampton. Sarah Kearsey and Sharon Ketley, who abseiled for us in 2016, are organising a team from Southampton Eye Unit to join them on the 21 July. The 5k route is set on Southampton Common and participants make their way over ten huge inflatable obstacles.

We are looking forward to another active year of fundraising.
Events are being planned for later in the year and an update will be given in our next Newsletter.

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

Tel: 023 8059 9073
www.giftofsight.org.uk

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