

Preface

The International Symposia on Retinal Degeneration have been held in conjunction with the biennial meeting of the International Society of Eye Research (ISER) since 1984. These RD Symposia have allowed basic and clinician scientists from around the world to convene and present their new research findings. They have been organized to allow substantial time for discussions and one-on-one interactions in a relaxed atmosphere, where international friendships and collaborations can be fostered.

The XVI International Symposium on Retinal Degeneration (also known as RD2014) was held from July 13–18, 2014 at the Asilomar Conference Center in the beautiful city of Pacific Grove, California, USA. The meeting brought together 272 basic and clinician scientists, retinal specialists in ophthalmology, and trainees in the field from all parts of the world. In the course of the meeting, 43 platform and 159 poster presentations were given, and a majority of these are presented in this proceedings volume. New discoveries and state of the art findings from most research areas in the field of retinal degenerations were presented. This was the largest of all of the RD Symposia, with the greatest number of attendees and presentations.

The RD2014 meeting was highlighted by three special keynote lectures. The first was given by **John Flannery**, PhD, of the University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, CA. Dr. Flannery discussed “Engineering AAV vectors to target specific functional subclasses of retinal neurons and glia.” Dr. Flannery’s talk was the first named keynote lecture of the RD Symposia in 32 years, the Edward H. Gollob Lecture, named for the President of the Foundation Fighting Blindness. The second keynote lecture was given by **Sally Temple**, PhD, Director of the Neural Stem Cell Institute, Regenerative Research Foundation, Rensselaer, NY. Dr. Temple discussed “Endogenous RPE stem cells, their surprising plasticity and implications for therapeutic applications.” The third keynote lecture was given by **Samuel G. Jacobson**, MD, PhD, of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA. Dr. Jacobson discussed “A treatment trial for an inherited retinal degeneration: what have we learned?”

The scientific meeting ended with a “Welcome to RD2016” by Prof. Nagahisa Yoshimura of Kyoto, Japan, along with the organizers primarily responsible for the meeting, Drs. John Ash and Robert E. Anderson.

We thank the outstanding management and staff of the beautiful Asilomar Conference Center for their assistance in making this an exceptionally smooth-running conference and a truly memorable experience for all of the attendees. These included, in particular, **Suzan Carabarin, Vivian Garcia, Sammy Ramos and Carlene Miller**. We also thank **Kelly Gilford** and **Jason McIntosh** for providing audio/visual equipment and services that resulted in a flawless flow of platform presentations. We thank **Steve Henry** of Associated Hosts, Inc. for planning and implementing transportation of most of the attendees to and from the Asilomar meeting venue, the memorable whale watching excursion, as well as for providing the dynamic “Beach Boys Band” for the end-of-meeting Gala for a truly California experience. Lastly, we thank **Franz Badura** of Pro Retina Germany for serenading the attendees at the Gala with his beautiful trumpet solos.

The Symposium received international financial support from a number of organizations. We are particularly pleased to thank The Foundation Fighting Blindness, Columbia, Maryland, for its continuing support of this and all previous biennial Symposia, without which we could not have held these important meetings. In addition, for the seventh time, the National Eye Institute of the National Institutes of Health contributed in a major way to the meeting. In the past, funds from these two organizations allowed us to provide 25–35 Travel Awards to young investigators and trainees working in the field of retinal degenerations. However, the response to the Travel Awards program was extraordinary, with 110 applicants, many more than in the past. For this reason, we sought additional support for the Travel Awards program. We are extremely appreciative for the contributions from Pro Retina Germany, the Fritz Tobler Foundation Switzerland and from Ed and Sandy Gollob. In total, we were able to fund 49 Travel Awards, the largest number ever an RD Symposium held in North America. We are grateful to the BrightFocus Foundation, which supported the important poster sessions. Many of the contributing foundations sent members of their organizations to attend the meeting. Their participation and comments in the scientific sessions were instructive to many, offering new perspectives to some of the problems being discussed. The Travel Awardees were selected on the basis of 9 independent scores of their submitted abstracts, 6 from each of the organizers and 3 from the other members of the Travel Awards Committee for RD2014, Drs. Jacque Duncan, Mabelle Pardue and XianJie Yang.

We also acknowledge the diligent and outstanding efforts of Ms. **Holly White-side**, who along with Dr. **John Ash**, carried out most of the administrative aspects of the RD2014 Symposium, and designed and maintained the meeting website. Holly is the Administrative Manager of Dr. Anderson’s laboratory at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center. For this Symposium, Ms. **Melody Marcum**, Director of Development of the Dean McGee Eye Institute, worked closely and extensively in selecting and negotiating the meeting venue, and in planning the meals, entertainment and various events. Melody and Holly were crucial to the success of the RD2014 symposium. Also, Dr. **Michael Matthes** in Dr. LaVail’s laboratory

played a major role in all aspects in the production of this volume, along with the assistance of Ms. **Cathy Lau-Villacorta**, also in Dr. LaVail's laboratory.

Finally, we honor the monumental efforts of Holly Whiteside. Holly has been the RD Symposium Coordinator since 2000, and during that time she has been the "face" of the RD Symposia. She has been responsible for virtually all of the administrative aspects of the RD Symposia for 16 years, and most repeat attendees feel a close relationship with Holly. She is now stepping back from the efforts of the RD Symposia to pursue personal and professional avenues. We have valued Holly's efforts enormously over these years, and we are proud to dedicate this volume to her.

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