

InsideRetina Directory

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EYE SIGHTINGS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

DR. ROBERT AVERY won “Best Talk of the Meeting” at the Vit Buckle conference in Miami for his presentation on the safety of anti-VEGF therapy. Dr. Avery attended The Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO) annual meeting in Denver, the Hawaii Eye Meeting in Maui and the Aspen Retinal Detachment Society. He also presented research at the Aegean Retina Meeting in Mykonos and the ASRS in Vienna.

DR. ALESSANDRO CASTELLARIN attended the Aspen Retinal Detachment Society Meeting and presented lectures on AMD in St. Louis, MO; and vein occlusion and diabetic macular edema in Los Angeles. He was also recognized by Consumers’ Research Council of America as Top Ophthalmologist 2015.

DR. DILSHER DHOOT lectured at the Cleveland Clinic Retina Symposium and presented on the treatment of diabetic macular edema in Seattle and Sacramento. He also presented at the ASRS Meeting in Vienna and will be traveling to Bermuda to present at the annual Club Vitreous meeting.

DR. MA’AN NASIR attended the Hawaiian Eye Meeting in Maui.

DR. DANTE PIERAMICI was recently recognized as a distinguished Alumnus of the Wilmer Eye Institute at the Johns Hopkins Hospital, where he presented a historical account of the management of serious eye injuries. In May, Dr. Pieramici presented original research on the treatment of diabetic retinopathy at the annual ARVO meeting in Denver and facilitated discussions with some of the worlds’ leading AMD researchers. He was also the guest speaker for a group of leading Japanese retinal specialists attending ARVO. In March, Dr. Pieramici was a quest speaker at the COPHY meeting in Sorrento, Italy where he debated surgical techniques and discussed new data on diabetic macular edema. In February, Dr. Pieramici attended and presented original research at the Annual Macula Society meeting in Scottsdale, Arizona.



DR. NATHAN STEINLE lectured at The Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO) annual conference in Denver. He also presented at the Cleveland Clinic Retina Symposium and lectured in Honolulu and Rapid City. He received an

Honors Award from the American Society of Retina Specialists at the 33rd Annual Meeting in Vienna, where he also presented on research performed by the CRRF.

CALIFORNIA RETINA RESEARCH FOUNDATION

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GROUNDBREAKING, NON-INVASIVE THERAPY AMONG HIGHLIGHTS AT ARVO MEETING

A new, non-invasive procedure that takes only three minutes to administer was among the highlights at this year’s Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO) meeting held in Denver this past May.

The new technology, OCT angiography, allows one machine to perform both OCT and angiography without the need for a dye injection. Though the device is approved for use in Europe, it has not yet passed U.S. FDA authorization. However, given California Retina Consultants research capabilities, several of the device manufacturers have offered to loan our practice a device for research purposes over the next 6-12 months. This device will soon be avail-

able for use on study patients in the Santa Barbara office and may one day replace traditional angiography in viable circumstances.

California Retina Research Foundation was well represented at ARVO with Drs. Robert Avery, Dante Pieramici, Nathan Steinle, Gabriel Gordon and study coordinator Sarah Fishbein attending. Drs. Avery and Gordon presented on a potential safety signal for diabetics treated with intense anti-VEGF therapy while Dr. Pieramici presented a poster in collaboration with Genentech analyzing diabetic retinopathy outcomes with anti-VEGF treatments in randomized clinical trials. Dr. Steinle stole the show with a remarkable presenta-

tion to hundreds of specialists about treating vitreomacular traction (VMT) with either a gas bubble or ocriplasmin (Jetrea®). The physicians at CRRF have been regulars at the ARVO meeting for decades, presenting new research and organizing study groups to discuss the future direction of retinal research. The ARVO meeting is a wonderful intersection where basic science and clinical sciences meet, with the mutual goal of improving our understanding of blinding eye diseases so that effective treatments can be developed.



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Dr. Dante Pieramici (far right), with new staff members of California Retina Research Foundation, from left to right: Sarah Fishbein, Larissa Halsell, Erica Morasse and Dr. Gabriel Gordon. Jack Giust and Gina Hong are not pictured here.

RESEARCH DEPARTMENT EXPANDING

California Retina Research Foundation (CRRF) is very excited to announce the recent hiring of Dr. Gabriel Gordon as the Director of the California Retina Research Foundation as well as the Director of Research for the California Retina Consultants (CRC).

“We are thrilled to have Dr. Gabriel Gordon join our staff as the Director of Research,” said Dr. Dante Pieramici. “Gabe brings a great depth of knowledge and expertise in the area of ocular research and his leadership will allow us to continue providing cutting edge translational retinal research.” Gabe grew up in Santa Barbara and attended Cate School. He received his undergraduate degree from UCLA and pursued a

PhD in cell and molecular biology from the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine. At Miami he worked with preeminent eye researchers at the top-ranked Bascom Palmer Eye Institute. Gabe then returned to Southern California and completed his post-doctorate at the University of Southern California where he worked on several translational projects for improving ocular regeneration. Dr. Gordon’s work in eye related research is diverse, and he has consulted for a number of companies. Thus, he is able to immediately add to the innovative perspective of the CRRF.

The research staff has also been expanded to include three new coordinators: Erica Morasse, Gina Hong and Larissa Halsell. Erica, a recent UCSB graduate (who majored in psychology) has been working in the Santa Barbara office since January. Gina, also a graduate of UCSB, has been working as a technician in the clinical practice for the last 2 years. She recently transitioned to the study department and brings with her an extensive knowledge of the clinical care of a number of retinal diseases. Larissa is the newest addition to the clinical research team and will coordinate stud-

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RESEARCH DEPARTMENT EXPANDING continued

ies in Santa Maria and other northern offices. After graduating from Occidental College in Los Angeles, Larissa received her Masters in Public Health (MPH) from Emory University.

Jack Giust and Sarah Fishbein continue to oversee numerous studies in the Bakersfield, Santa Barbara and Oxnard/Ventura offices and have been critical in training and transitioning the new study coordinators. Stop by to meet our new staff and discuss clinical trial eligibility.

CRRF would like to thank Michelle Hanna, a valued research coordinator, who has transitioned into nursing school in the Bay area. We wish her the best in her future career and know that she will be missed by many of our research participants.

AMD SUPPORT GROUP HELPS PATIENTS

The idea to start a support group for patients struggling with macular degeneration and vision loss was the brainchild of Bakersfield patient and licensed family therapist Mrs. Etta Robin.

“I have already worked through my issues related to macular degeneration and I knew I could be of assistance to others who are suffering a similar fate,” explained Mrs. Robin, who offers her services as an experienced facilitator in the Bakersfield office every two months. “I have firsthand knowledge of what it’s like to live with deteriorating vision and that gives me a great deal of credibility when talking with patients.”

A former patient ambassador for Genentech and a previous Kern County Medical Health employee, Mrs. Robin clearly has compassion and a wealth of experience. In fact, she has more than 30 years’ experience as a marriage and family therapist, yet Mrs. Robin is quick to point out that these hour-long meetings are “not therapy, but support.” She explains that the group operates as an open dialogue with discussion.

The next AMD Bakersfield support group meetings will take place on Thursday, September 17 and November 19 from 4:30 – 5:30 PM at the CRC Bakersfield office. Please contact Etta Robin at (661)319-6604 or earob62@pacbell.net if you are interested in attending; patients and family members are welcome. Due to the success of the Bakersfield meetings, we are starting a similar group in the Santa Barbara office. The first meeting will take place on August 6th at 5:00 PM. Please contact Erica Morasse at 805-963-1648 ext 3033 or erica@californiaretina.com if interested. CRC technicians attend the meetings as well to help answer any medical related questions.

DR. AVERY NAMED VISION CARE SPECIALIST OF THE YEAR

Dr. Robert Avery received the 2015 Vision Care Specialist of the Year award from the Ventura County Medical Resource Foundation for his outstanding contributions to the field of retina research and practice in the Ventura community. The award is given annually to individuals whose personal ethics and professional performance reflect the ideals of involvement, commitment and contributions to healthcare, as exemplified by the late Drs. Fainer and Tauber, two beloved Ventura County medical practitioners. The 22nd annual awards dinner was held on May 21 in Camarillo. Dr. Avery was selected from a wide pool of optometrists and ophthalmologists in Ventura County.



SANTA BARBARA OPENS NEWLY RENOVATED CLINICAL AND RESEARCH FACILITIES

More exam rooms, shorter wait times, additional state-of-the-art equipment and even calm-inducing neutral-toned walls and music are some of the features that reflect CRC’s newly renovated Santa Barbara location. The 10,000-square-foot facility is located just across the parking lot from the old building though it looks and feels a world apart.

“My favorite aspect of the new building is the fact that it now reflects the high quality of the physicians that practice within it. Our physicians have excelled in their profession and have spent years perfecting their skills and growing their practice to become one of the premiere clinical and research practices in the world. We now have a building that mirrors these efforts and allows our doctors to practice medicine without any limitations of space or staffing,” said Alison Ratliff, CRC Chief Operating Officer. Ratliff worked closely with Dr. Steve Couvillon as co-project manager for the construction.

The modern interior offers thousands of additional square feet of space, which Ratliff explains allows for contiguous work areas, a significant benefit over the previous building’s divided offices, which spanned three separate suites. The California Retina Research Foundation headquarters is now located on the third floor of the new building and includes a high-tech conference room for board meetings and educational events. “It’s much easier to collaborate with our research department and consult with other doctors when we are all housed in the same building,” said Dr. Couvillon.



It’s also extremely beneficial for the patients – and their family members or designated drivers. The new space allows patients to efficiently flow through the clinic and with double the number of exam and work-up rooms the wait time has been significantly reduced. In addition, the sitting areas for family members has nearly tripled in size making the space much more comfortable while affording spectacular views of Santa Barbara and the Channel Islands.

“The Santa Barbara office had reached a point where, as the hub of the clinical and research operations of CRC, we needed additional space to house all of our employees assisting in research, billing and administration, as well as providing an upgraded space that will adequately serve our patients now and in the future,” said Dr. Couvillon, who was instrumental in overseeing the design aesthetic. CRC worked with DMHA Architecture and Channel Coast Construction.

CURRENT TRIAL UPDATE

The California Retina Research Foundation (CRRF) supports ongoing research for patients with blinding retinal diseases and also provides financial support for young scientists who are working in the field of vision research. Please contact your physician or our study staff to determine if you are a candidate for any of the following, ongoing clinical trials .

DRY AMD: While there are currently no approved treatments for dry AMD, vitamins are considered the best standard of care. However, the effect vitamins have on the progression of dry AMD is unclear. Therefore, the CRC is involved in phase II and III clinical trials looking at a therapeutic monthly injection that could help reduce the progression of geographic atrophy (dry AMD). We have learned that inflammation is likely one key factor in the development and progression of geographic atrophy. Specifically, over-activity of the complement system, one of the systems that regulates inflammation, has been associated with AMD. The strategy would therefore be to inhibit this system locally with the hopes of slowing down retinal cellular loss. CRC has been involved in the early clinical development of the drug lampalizumab, which is now entering a phase III large national and international trial. If the results of the trial are positive then this drug may be the first to receive FDA approval for the treatment of geographic atrophy. The landmark phase III trial is now enrolling in our Santa Barbara and Bakersfield sites.

WET AMD: The currently available agents Avastin, Lucentis, and Eylea have been immensely successful in treating neovascular (wet AMD), however they offer limited benefit to some. Therefore, CRC is conducting several sponsored trials studying a variety of therapeutic options that will hopefully benefit more patients suffering from wet AMD. One trial is investigating the use of a port delivery system, or an implant that can be refilled at regular intervals. The hope is that the port will deliver a low constant level of drug over a more extended period of time, before refilling is necessary. The second trial also involves a drug that should suppress wet AMD over a longer period. It involves using a viral vector to insert a section of DNA to produce a protein inhibitor of VEGF and block the neovascular (wet) process. This trial involves an intraoperative sub-retinal injection of a viral vector that has been safely engineered to benefit the host it infects by causing the host to continue to produce the anti-VEGF agent. It is hoped that this injection can eliminate the need for monthly injections of anti-VEGF agents while maintaining excellent visual outcomes.

DIABETIC RETINOPATHY (DR): CRC has many trials looking at novel therapeutic options for treating DR. In addition to participating in four NIH-sponsored trials (DRCR Network related) testing various combinations and regimens of anti-VEGF, laser, and steroid therapies, CRC is also participating in several investigator-sponsored and industry-sponsored trials. One of our trials for DR uses genetic samples from patients to determine if the NORRIN intracellular signaling pathway is involved in adult retinal disease and macular capillary dropout (loss of microvasculature in central area of retina).

OTHER RETINAL DISEASES: CRC is currently enrolling patients for a variety of ongoing trials that focus on other retinal diseases. One is looking at the use of Jetrea® for treating symptomatic vitreomacular adhesion (VMA), while two others are genetic studies using DNA from subject blood samples to identify genetic causes of various retinal diseases.

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