Bascom Palmer Awarded Department of Defense Grant

Bascom Palmer Eye Institute has been awarded a grant from the Department of Defense (DOD) office of the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs and the Clinical and Rehabilitative Medicine Research Program.

The 3-year, $999,999 grant will focus on members of the military who may get glaucoma as a result of trauma to the eye. Glaucoma is a group of irreversible blinding diseases that steal the sight slowly and progressively without evidence of pain. A large number of active duty military servicemen and veterans with trauma-induced glaucoma are mostly non-responsive to conventional glaucoma medication. Proposed research aims to provide new therapy and therapeutic molecules to lower intraocular pressure for such patients.

The research and DOD grant is possible due to a long-term collaboration between Sanjoy Bhattacharya, Ph.D., a basic researcher; and Richard K. Lee, M.D., Ph.D., a glaucoma specialist and clinician-scientist. Unbiased data derived from characterized clinical samples from Lee’s laboratory was a guiding force toward these discoveries.

In addition, Dr. Noel Ziebarth from the University of Miami’s Department of Biomedical Engineering will contribute expertise in atomic force microscopy. The inception of this project became possible as a result of the mentorship and facilitation of Bascom Palmer neuro-ophthalmologist, Byron Lam, M.D.

Drs. Richard Lee and Sanjoy Bhattacharya

Glaucoma Research Update

Bascom Palmer’s extramural research portfolio for FY 2014 will be $10.8 million. Currently the Institute has 97 active research grants and contracts. For the eleventh year in a row, Bascom Palmer won a core grant for vision research from the National Eye Institute. This award recognizes the size and scope of the vision research program and supports a number of major instruments and facilities that are important to the research program.

To trace the history of Bascom Palmer is to recognize the important role that philanthropy has played. A current focus is in the area of glaucoma.

Donna Mae Balkan Litowitz learned the power of vision and the spirit of charity at a young age in Chicago as she watched her mother help a stranger who had stumbled in the street and broke her glasses. Unable to safely see, Litowitz’s mother, Ethel Balkan, went out of her way to walk the distraught woman to a doctor. Upon learning that replacing the glasses would be a hardship for the woman, Balkan volunteered to have the glasses repaired or replaced. Litowitz never forgot the impact of her mother’s generosity or the importance of vision. It is in this spirit that Litowitz has given $2 million in honor of her parents, Samuel and Ethel Balkan, to save vision in the most vulnerable: infants and children. Inspired by the work of glaucoma specialist, Alana Grajewski, M.D., the Litowitz gift will fund an integrated care service for children with glaucoma at Bascom Palmer. This international program, to be led by Grajewski, is the first of its kind worldwide. The Samuel & Ethel Balkan International Pediatric Glaucoma Center will serve as the hub for treatment and international collaboration on the research and treatment of infants and children with glaucoma.