

# RETINA RESEARCH FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

Foresight for Sight

November 2020

Issue Number 3 / Volume 42

*Retina Research Foundation Newsletter is published three times per year: Spring, Summer and Fall.*



*Thanksgiving Greetings  
&  
Best Wishes*

*The Board of Directors and Advisory Trustees  
Retina Research Foundation*



# 2020 RRF GRANT RECIPIENTS



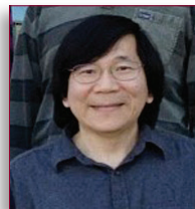
**Wolfgang Baehr, PhD**  
John Moran Eye Center  
University of Utah  
Salt Lake City, Utah



**Richard L. Hurwitz, MD**  
Baylor College of Medicine  
Houston, Texas



**Curtis Brandt, PhD**  
McPherson Eye Research Institute  
University of Wisconsin  
Madison, Wisconsin



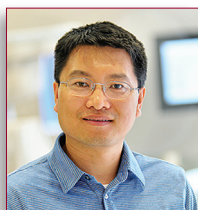
**Lih Kuo, PhD**  
Texas A&M University  
Health Science Center  
Bryan, Texas



**Milam Brantley, MD, PhD**  
Vanderbilt University  
Medical Center  
Nashville, Tennessee



**Graeme Mardon, PhD**  
Baylor College of Medicine  
Houston, Texas



**Rui Chen, PhD**  
Baylor College of Medicine  
Houston, Texas



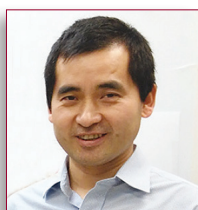
**James Monaghan, PhD**  
Northeastern University  
Boston, Massachusetts



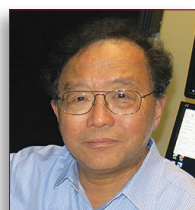
**Timothy Corson, PhD**  
Indiana University School  
of Medicine  
Indianapolis, Indiana



**Luke A. Wiley, PhD**  
Institute for Vision  
Research Center  
Carver College of Medicine  
Iowa City, Iowa



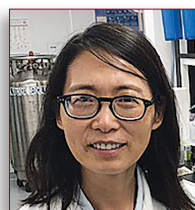
**Jianhai Du, PhD**  
West Virginia University  
School of Medicine  
Morgantown, West Virginia



**Samuel Wu, PhD**  
Baylor College of Medicine  
Houston, Texas



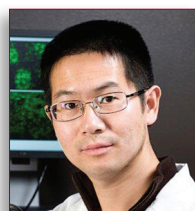
**Yingbin Fu, PhD**  
Cullen Eye Institute  
Baylor College of Medicine  
Houston, Texas



**Hong Yu, PhD**  
Bascom Palmer Eye Institute  
University of Miami  
Miami, Florida



**Francesco Giorgianni, PhD**  
University of Tennessee  
Health Science Center  
Memphis, Tennessee



**Wenbo Zhang, PhD**  
UT Medical Branch – Galveston  
Galveston, Texas



**November 2020**

Dear Friends,

As we reflect on 2020, we realize how much we have missed seeing all of you in person! We have missed the deep conversations and the interactive sharing of expertise and knowledge as we work together to reduce blindness due to retinal disease. Yet through virtual meetings and with cautious social distancing protocols once work resumed, our vision researchers returned to the laboratory, the good work began again, and Retina Research Foundation efforts have continued with renewed conviction. We are filled with gratitude, and proud of the many accomplishments achieved this year in spite of the obstacles the pandemic has presented.

RRF funds a wide variety of scientific research and educational programs, including pilot study grants, ongoing research projects, lifetime achievement awards, international fellowships, educational programs and travel grants. Despite travel being curtailed, most of these programs achieved their desired goals this year, and vision scientists the world over have benefited from their collaboration and shared knowledge exchange. In total, RRF has surpassed the \$36 million mark in funds spent on research since our founding over 50 years ago.

In this most unusual year with many pressing causes, vision preservation is a cause you have chosen to actively take an interest in. Thanks to your ongoing interest and support, RRF has steadfastly supported basic science researchers and recognized outstanding leaders in the field of vision preservation throughout this year, as always. If you have not yet given to RRF, we ask that you consider doing so now.

With this final newsletter of 2020, let us take the opportunity to wish you a very happy Thanksgiving, a healthy and joyful holiday season, and all the best in the New Year and for many years to come. Keep safe and thank you for your loyal support.

With best regards,

*Frank K Eggleston, DDS*

Frank K. Eggleston, DDS  
*Chairman of the Board*

*Arthur Willis*

Arthur Willis, MD  
*Fund Drive Chair*

# 2012 ICO-RRF Helmerich Fellow at the Helm of Magrabi ICO Cameroon Eye Institute



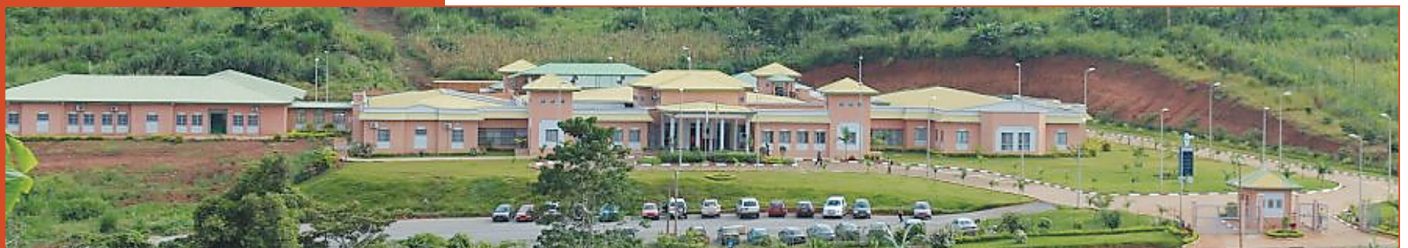
*Dr. Henry E. Nkumbe, MD  
2012 ICO-RRF Helmerich  
International Fellow*

While it can be difficult to truly know the impact of a program, the career trajectory of Dr. Henry Nkumbe, an alumnus of the **2012 ICO-RRF Helmerich Fellowship program** and his outstanding contributions to international ophthalmology, fittingly illustrate the promise and possibilities inherent to this RRF sponsored educational program. Throughout more than a decade, the ICO-RRF Helmerich Fellowship program has benefited many individuals, medical institutions and countries. Each year, the International Council of Ophthalmology (ICO) selects two outstanding young ophthalmologists from developing countries who are committed to enhancing ophthalmic education and patient care in their home countries and awards them support for one year of ophthalmology subspecialty training at one of the world's leading ophthalmology centers. Upon completion, the fellows commit to return to a position at a teaching institution or public service hospital in their home country. RRF provides the program funding in honor of the public service leadership of Mr. W. H. Helmerich, III.



*Dr. Nkumbe providing an overview of  
MICEI's OTC imaging capabilities*

Today, Dr. Nkumbe is Medical Director, CEO and Chief of the Retina Department at the **Magrabi ICO Cameroon Eye Institute (MICEI)** at Yaoundé, Cameroon, having been appointed to this leadership position in February 2020. Established by the Africa Eye Foundation in 2016, MICEI is Central Africa's first non-profit subspecialty eye hospital and training institute. Their mission is to provide comprehensive, international quality eye care services to individuals, without any distinctions, at an affordable cost. The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified the people of Sub-Saharan Africa and the sub-region of Central Africa as suffering with some of the world's highest prevalence of functional visual impairment and blindness. Because at least 80% of vision loss and blindness is avoidable, either preventable or treatable with currently available knowledge and technology, it was imperative that resources be made available to the region.



*MICEI, Cameroon*

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MICEI treats patients from throughout Cameroon and neighboring Central African countries, providing inpatient and outpatient services for general eye care, cataracts, glaucoma and retina. It sponsors outreach clinics referred to as “camps” throughout the region to bring general eye screenings to individuals living in areas far from vision care providers.

MICEI’s mission extends to training the next generation of leaders in eye care -- ophthalmologists, ophthalmology sub-specialists and support staff from Cameroon and other French-speaking Central West African countries -- to provide high quality eye care services and minimize the need to send patients abroad. Since the official commissioning in March, 2017, 160 health professionals from 10 African countries have completed MICEI training in courses as varied as imaging, refraction for allied ophthalmologists, instrument maintenance, residency programs, cataract surgery, ophthalmology surgery, and ophthalmology surgical training for nursing personnel. The Institute is also involved in ophthalmologic research, participating in five projects during 2019. Dr. Nkumbe serves as the principal investigator of research in two of the five currently ongoing studies.

Eight years ago, Henry E. Nkumbe, MD, a native of Cameroon, completed his ICO RRF Helmerich Fellowship in retina surgery at Aravind Eye Hospital, Madurai, India. Building upon his ophthalmology residency at the Eye Foundation Hospital in Lagos, Nigeria, and the Jules Stein Eye Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles, the Helmerich fellowship completed his medical training, launching Dr. Nkumbe’s on a voyage to lead his team of retina and vitreous surgeons at the Institute, to oversee the ophthalmology training and public service programs at MICEI, and to bring sight-saving specialist eye care to many thousands of Central West African people.

For more information on the Helmerich Fellowship program visit: [retinaresearchfnd.org](http://retinaresearchfnd.org)

For more information on MICEI visit: [micei.org](http://micei.org)

Photos:  
MICEI, 2019 Annual Report  
and website



*Dr. Nkumbe, Medical Director, CEO and Chief of the Retina Department, MICEI, Yaoundé, Cameroon*



*An MICEI outpatient eye exam*



*Patients receiving vision screening services at an MICEI outreach camp*

# Protect Yourself and Your Eyes During Covid-19 Pandemic



Much has been learned about the coronavirus since a 33-year old ophthalmologist in Wuhan, China, Dr. Li Wenliang, first raised the alarm of a cluster of SARS-like pneumonia cases in December, 2019. There are ways that we can protect ourselves and our sight that continue to be studied and reported upon.

A study, published online in September's JAMA Ophthalmology, indicates that people who wear eyeglasses daily may be less likely to be infected with COVID-19. The researchers evaluated a cohort of 276 hospitalized patients with COVID-19. The proportion of those infected who wore glasses daily for eight hours or more was lower (5.8%) than in the general population (31.5%), suggesting that **daily eyeglass wearers may be less susceptible to COVID-19**. As people pay more attention to wearing masks and home isolation, they might not be as cautious when it comes to frequently washing their hands and avoiding touching their face and eyes, but wearing glasses may offer another important line of defense from contracting the virus. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamaophthalmology/fullarticle/2770872>



During self-quarantine, regular eye-care visits for procedures like anti-VEGF treatment for neovascular age-related macular degeneration (AMD) may be postponed to a later date. This scenario is similar to what was evaluated in a study by Dr. Rishi P. Singh published in Retina 2020. Dr. Singh, who is affiliated with the Cleveland Clinic, wanted to understand how a lapse in treatment affects individuals with neovascular AMD. In a retrospective,

controlled study of 482 patients, his research found that the **impact of missed visits for even three to five months is significant and may result in lost visual acuity, which may not be reversible**. As the lapse time increased, the visual acuity decreased relative to the control group who maintained their treatment. While macula thickness, which normally correlates with visual acuity, did recover through 12 months of follow-up and resumption of anti-VEGF treatments, visual acuity statistically significantly decreased in Dr. Singh's retrospective study.

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# Wishing Margaret Well!



*Margaret Smith Farese, RRF Administrator, 2011-2020*

After nearly a decade of exceptional service, Margaret Smith Farese retired as RRF's Administrator in March of this year. With thoughtful insight and a steady hand, Margaret oversaw all aspects of RRF's day-to-day operations, from board relations and research program supervision, to bookkeeping and donor relations, and as managing editor of all RRF publications. Margaret's tenure was punctuated with wonderful trips supporting RRF's research and educational efforts, and milestone events such as RRF's 50th year Gala Celebration in 2019. Her meticulous attention to the organizational details ensure RRF's activities are well-documented and the Foundation's administration is solidly positioned for future decades.

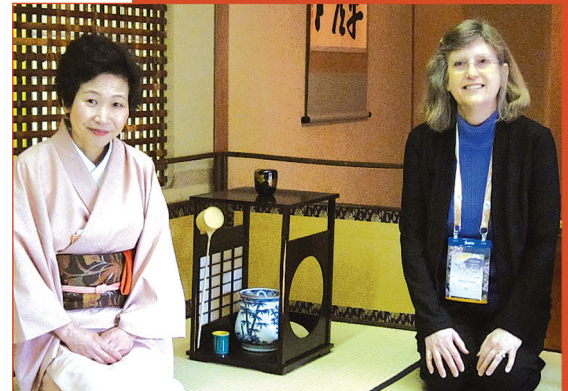
As Margaret turns to spending more time with her loved ones and to pursuing her many interests, her RRF family wishes her well!



*Margaret & Frank Farese, 2019*



*Ames Smith, RRF Advisory Director, Dr. Alice McPherson, and Margaret Farese, 2018*



*RRF Trip to World Ophthalmology Congress (WOC) in Tokyo, Japan, 2014*

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## Protect Yourself and Your Eyes During Covid-19 Pandemic

As we experience a spike in COVID-19 infections this fall, contact your doctor to learn about the safety protocols they have instituted to make it safe for you to continue your scheduled treatments. **Bottom line:** This research may help you evaluate the risks of not going for treatment on your longer term vision prospects.

<https://www.healio.com/news/ophthalmology/20200908/lapse-in-care-may-yield-lost-visual-acuity-in-amd>

# RETINA RESEARCH FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

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**Editor in Chief:** Alice McPherson, M.D.  
**Managing Editor:** Virginia Gissel Schwanauer

Retina Research Foundation is a Nonprofit Organization.  
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BLIND OR  
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### IN HONOR OF

**Dr. Aaron Alme**, my retinal surgeon  
Dr. Joshua Newsted

**My Retinal Surgeon**, who saved my sight  
Betty Ryan Beets

### Network For Good

Facebook employees

### IN MEMORY OF

**L. Henry Gissel, Jr.**  
Princess Cameron  
Mrs. Ray Taggart Chilton  
Rose Cullen  
Margaret and Frank Farese  
John Hantak, Northern Trust  
Betsy and Henry Hope  
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Suzanne Miller  
Janet and Dr. Ben Orman  
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