

Funding world-class vision research

Dear Friends and Supporters

The beginning of the year is always a good time to reflect on past successes and 2016 was an excellent year in many ways. Gift of Sight income continued to increase beyond expectation thanks to the receipt of generous legacies and great help from fundraisers and supporters. This has enabled us to develop preliminary research data and thus apply to major funding organisations for more detailed and

definitive research studies. One notable example of this is our successful application to a funding scheme jointly run by the National Institute of Health Research and the Medical Research Council. I was awarded a grant of just under £1 million to lead the first ever randomised controlled clinical trial for a form of macular degeneration which affects patients in their thirties and forties. This disease is called central serous retinopathy. Twenty hospitals across England are helping us with this effort and the first patients have now been recruited. This success indicates the value of the Gift of Sight Appeal as the funding it provided has enabled us to demonstrate the potential value of larger studies, helping us obtain considerable financial support for this clinical trial.



Professor Andrew Lotery

Another exciting development is that we are advertising to recruit a senior academic researcher who will be known as 'The Professor Andrew Elkington Fellow', in memory of Andrew, a distinguished ophthalmic surgeon who was my predecessor in the Chair of Ophthalmology at the University of Southampton. I remember him with great fondness and this is a perfect way to honour him.

We were saddened to learn of the death of our friend and Patron, Mr Richard Adams. Richard was an author and active supporter of Gift of Sight for many years. Our thanks go to his widow, Elizabeth, and his family who have kindly asked for donations in his memory to be made to Gift of Sight.

Following my abseil in 2016, I have now committed to running the ABP Southampton Half Marathon along with my wife Helen and one of my sons. Our Just Giving address is given in the Events page on the back of this Newsletter, if anyone would like to sponsor our family effort online. Cheques can be sent to Ailsa in the usual way. I am always very grateful for your help and I feel sure that our speed will be increased by your kind support!

I hope that some of you will join me and my colleagues at the forthcoming Gift of Sight Lecture. A flyer is enclosed with this Newsletter. This event will give us an opportunity to provide an update on some of our clinical and academic projects.

Thank you as always for your help which is greatly appreciated by us all.



Andrew Lotery MD, FRCOphth
Professor of Ophthalmology

An Update from Mr Jay Self

The paediatric research team has continued to be very productive over the last few months. Studies are showing how to use cutting-edge genetic techniques to improve diagnoses and cut down on expensive and invasive tests in children. Other studies have shown that many people with unexplained low vision actually have forms of albinism. My clinical team have identified a new neurological disease and are showing how small changes in DNA, which should not cause diseases, can actually cause vision loss. In other studies I am working with teams in Exeter, Pakistan and the USA to describe two new neurological diseases which also cause retinal disease as well as working with underdeveloped communities to improve their clinical care and to identify new eye diseases. In Southampton my team is developing a novel drug therapy to save sight in people with forms of albinism and have shown, through novel eye tracking and iPad app studies, that children with nystagmus see the world very differently to others.

In surgical studies our clinical team have developed a new technique for adjusting surgery in very young babies and we are currently studying the effect on long term eye health of very early surgery and general anaesthetic in tiny babies. We are also recruiting more children to clinical studies than ever before. Recently purchased mobile technology is under study with the hope of examining very sick children on wards who could not have more formal testing and who are in the most profound need. This includes children with brain tumours, severe metabolic diseases or injuries caused by major accidents. I would like to build on the current success by funding new team members, including post-doctoral researchers and senior research technicians. I am always grateful for the help given by fundraisers in this respect.

An update from Dr Arjuna Ratnayaka

A major research interest in my group is studying the close links between the ageing retina and brain. There are several research projects underway which aim to gain new insights from the Amyloid beta group of misfolding proteins that are involved in both Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD) and Alzheimer's disease.

In December 2016, Savannah Lynn, a final year doctoral student in my team was awarded a prestigious pump-prime award from the Alzheimer's Research UK (ARUK) South Coast Network. Her project aims to study how the optic nerve becomes damaged with age. The ability to attract competitive external funding as an early career investigator will help Savannah establish herself as a promising future scientist and I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate her on this outstanding achievement.

In February 2017, doctoral students, postgraduate and medical students from the group hosted a 'Scientific Cafe' at the ARUK South Coast Network Dementia day. This event, held at the University of Southampton Highfield campus, was attended by several hundred participants ranging from scientists, clinicians, dementia sufferers and their families, as well as carers. The theme of the Scientific Cafe was 'Visual problems in patients with Alzheimer's disease and Dementia'. The event provided the opportunity for students to discuss their research which helps develop their public engagement skills and, most importantly, to increase public awareness of major blinding and neurological diseases affecting the elderly. The team are hugely grateful to Gift of Sight donors for supporting their salaries and research. Savannah is also running the Southampton ABP Half Marathon to raise funds and details of her giving page are listed in our Events column.

To see details of papers published : <https://www.giftofsight.org.uk/about-us/our-senior-research-team>

In memory donations were gratefully received in 2016 in the names of:

Mr Richard Adams	Mr John Austin	Mrs Elizabeth Bald	Mrs Margaret Barron
Mr Stanley Beavill	Mrs Masie Bendle	Mr Malcolm Berrow	Mrs Patricia Freemantle
Mrs Rose Grant	Mrs Kitty Guidi	Mr Patrick Hannifan	Mrs Nancy Horobin
Mr Mike Jones	Mr Bill Munt	Mrs Nora Rosendale	Mrs Kathleen Sheppard
Mrs Frances Simpson	Mrs Juliette Spiller	Mrs Doris Swanton	Mrs G Thomson

THANK YOU

ANNUAL CAROL CONCERT

Huge congratulations and thanks to Philly Sargent and her team for organising a stunning Concert in Romsey Abbey on the 20 December. Over 600 guests joined us and helped to raise an amazing total of



John Rutter conducting the musicians and guests in Romsey Abbey

£17,000 from ticket sales and generous donations. The popularity of the Concert continues and the time and energy which is given by the committee, who are hugely supported by their families, is greatly appreciated. This year we were fortunate to hear readings from John Rutter CBE, Conductor, Composer and Record Producer and Bruce Parker, local journalist and TV presenter. John read 'Ballad of the Bread Man' by Charles Causley and Bruce adapted a reading from words by Helen Keller. The musical programme was sublime and John Rutter conducted some of his own carols, generously allowing the audience to join in with the chorus of his 'Star Carol'.

Thanks to the Reverend Tim Sledge for introducing the evening and to the team from Music in Romsey who gave tremendous back up with seating our guests and ensuring the evening ran smoothly. We are looking forward to the next Concert which will be held in Romsey Abbey on Friday 15 December 2017.

Victoria Gale : After a couple of cancellations, due to bad weather, Victoria journeyed from Brighton to jump out of a plane at Old Sarum. It was great to be there on the day to wish her luck, to meet her nearest and dearest and to thank her personally for helping our work by raising a tremendous £1372.

A huge thank you to all of you who send donations, help us when we need volunteers, raise funds for us during the year through organising events or making us your Charity of the Year.

Masonic Charitable Foundation : We are one of eight regional charities who have been selected to participate in a voting challenge by the Masonic Charitable Foundation to receive funding. Varying amounts are available but the grants will be awarded following online votes cast by our supporters and the wider public. The more votes, the larger the sum received. Please keep an eye on our website and social media for further details and support us in this challenge.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

2017 01 April	Jennifer Mansbridge and her nephew, Ed Phippard, are celebrating their 70th and 21st birthdays by jumping out of an aeroplane at Old Sarum. Please help them to raise funds for us by visiting their JustGiving page to donate and also to read their amusing story : https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/jenandedupinthesky
03 April	Jackie Davies will be holding an Easter Tombola and Cake Sale in Southampton Eye Unit Outpatients Department from early morning until mid afternoon. If you are in the Eye Unit on that day please help Jackie raise funds to support children's eye research.
23 April	Southampton ABP Half Marathon. Professor Andrew Lotery, his wife Helen and son Chris are completing the challenge together. Their JustGiving page address is: https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/Andrew-Lotery2 Savannah Lynn (mentioned in the update on research) and her fiancé Alec are also running and would appreciate support : https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/SavannahandAlecSouthamptonHalf
26 April	Gift of Sight Lecture : Details on the enclosed flyer. Please do join us at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Southampton. The talks are to update donors and supporters with studies being carried out in our vision science laboratories and hospital clinics.
21 May	Gift of Sight Skydive : a team of six intrepid jumpers will share their fear. We are really grateful for this support which started off following a talk to Hythe Probus Club in 2016. Owen Wright and Jack Aalen offered to jump from a plane and will be joined by family members. Rosie Bromfield-Young, who has a personal reason for raising funds for our research, will be jumping too. We'll be there to support the team who have pages on the Gift of Sight JustGiving website https://www.justgiving.com/sudt .
09 July	Ellie Keeling and Chelsea Norman who ran wearing 'eyeball' costumes last year have 'borrowed' a pedal car to participate in the Ringwood Pedal Car Grand Prix. The team will be named the 'Mad sc-eye-ntists' and will be made up from members of the vision research team. Any sponsorship you can spare will encourage them to practice their driving skills in the hope of winning a trophy. They will also be opening a page on Gift of Sight JustGiving.

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