Preface: A Focus on New Treatments for Blinding Ocular Diseases

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This publication presents results from a workshop held June 11 to 13, 2011, in Rancho Valencia, California, entitled “An Eye on Glaucoma: New Opportunities for Treatment.” The purpose of the workshop was to gather a small group of experts in the glaucoma field and, in an informal setting, pinpoint the key needs and opportunities for preventing, treating, and ultimately curing glaucoma.

For the past 10 years, the Drabkin Symposia have been sponsored and funded privately by Robert Drabkin. During this time, his philanthropy and commitment to the advancement of eye research have supported six symposia, each resulting in a published report. In 2011, Mr. Drabkin, his family, and others formed the Ocular Research Symposia Foundation (ORSF), the sponsoring entity for the current meeting on glaucoma. The establishment of ORSF will allow for additional sponsorship and, we anticipate, will afford a modus operandi for ensuring the continuation of this exciting programmatic effort.

The ORSF is unique in promoting movement toward effective treatments for blinding eye diseases. In the United States and around the world, government agencies provide the bulk of funding for medical research on eye diseases, along with numerous private foundations that fund research on specific ocular diseases. Instead of providing this type of direct funding, the ORSF focuses its resources on increasing awareness of the best research and treatment opportunities available for eye diseases. Through this educational approach, it greatly increases the possibility for funding high-potential treatment prospects by spotlighting research opportunities that are ripe for translation into clinical therapies. Periodically, the ORSF convenes a symposium of experts in a particular area of basic vision research and clinical ophthalmology, to review the most current scientific advances and identify those avenues that could best and most directly lead to a viable disease treatment. Based on this review, a summary document with recommendations is written and distributed to all stakeholders: government agencies, academic departments, industry leaders, and individual investigators. This document contains a compilation of both key needs and key opportunities that can then be used as a “roadmap to a cure,” making it possible to focus funding on the projects with the potential for the greatest payoff. The symposia documentation thus can provide a clear, logical path to treatment innovations for major blinding conditions.

Because there has been no commercial support provided for any of the Drabkin/ORSF symposia, the recommendations for research directions are unbiased in their assessment of treatment opportunities. The foundation not only identifies the greatest needs in addressing ophthalmic diseases, but also highlights and promotes the best and most practicable opportunities for treatments of these conditions, as pinpointed by worldwide leaders in eye research and patient care.