

ORIA Update

We were excited to host a webinar on 14 December which featured the work of our talented ORIA grant recipients. *Breakthroughs in Australian Eye Research* were highlighted at this special event, convened by Prof Mark Gillies, ORIA Vice-Chair.

Prof Robert Casson, Head of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences in Adelaide Medical School, spoke on cone rescue with laser photobiomodulation in retinal dystrophy. With retinitis pigmentosa now a leading cause of blindness in the working age population in developed regions, new treatments are needed. Light, in the far red to near-infrared spectrum (630-1000 nm), may provide a new way to treat this condition, a therapy known as 'photobiomodulation'. Encouraging results from a Phase I human study showed the treatment was safe and recovered an average of five letters of acuity. Precision medicine is now approaching the clinic and Dr Fred Chen of the Lions Eye Institute in Western Australia explained how molecular diagnosis and genome modulation are becoming a reality for retinal disease, using inherited retinal diseases as an example. Most interesting was the discussion on current frontiers of

Australian biotechs involved in developing personalised treatment for retinitis pigmentosa. Bietti crystalline dystrophy (BCD) is an autosomal recessive, adult-onset inherited retinal disease with an unmistakable retinal phenotype characterised by crystalline deposits throughout the posterior pole. It is one of the most common IRDs in Southeast Asia. Dr Tom Edwards from the Centre for Eye Research Australia presented his team's progress in developing a gene therapy approach for this incurable cause of vision loss.

Prof Stephanie Watson also spoke on light, as ultraviolet radiation (UVR) from sunlight causes common eye disorders, such as pterygium, and serious conditions including ocular surface squamous neoplasia and stem cell damage. With First World tools and techniques at a cellular level, exposure to UVR increased turnover in corneal cells. Implications for conditions such as keratoconus, which is more prevalent where sunlight is strongest, were discussed.

Our launch into the world of social media has proved successful and we are now following and reposting for several of our members and relevant organisations, as well as posting our

own updates, grant and event information. The ORIA social media platforms will improve the Altmetric scores for ORIA researchers (<https://www.altmetric.com/>). Grant recipients will be asked to tag us when promoting their ORIA funded research. This will help with recognition of their work and improve their search engine optimisation.

Please join us on our socials (Twitter and Facebook) to connect with us and if we can help in anyway, I can be contacted at oria@oria.org.au.

It has been a pleasure to lead the ORIA during these challenging times. The online world has provided the ORIA a great way to keep connecting with their members!

Prof Stephanie Watson
Chair, ORIA



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