Preface

The International Symposia on Retinal Degeneration have been held in conjunction with the biennial International Congress of Eye Research (ICER) since 1984. These RD Symposia have allowed basic and clinician scientists from around the world to convene and present their new research findings. They have been organized to allow sufficient time for discussions and one-on-one interactions in a relaxed atmosphere, where international friendships and collaborations can be fostered.

The XIV International Symposium on Retinal Degeneration (also known as RD2010) was held from July 13–17, 2010 at the Fairmont Tremblant Hotel in the resort village of Mont-Tremblant, Quebec, Canada. The meeting brought together 232 basic and clinician scientists, retinal specialists in ophthalmology, and trainees in the field from all parts of the world. In the course of the meeting, 38 platform and 134 poster presentations were given, and a majority of these are presented in this proceedings volume. New discoveries and state-of-the-art findings from most research areas in the field of retinal degenerations were presented. This was the largest of all of the RD Symposia, with the greatest number of attendees and presentations.

The RD2010 meeting was highlighted by three special plenary lectures. The first was given by Elise Héon, MD, of the University of Toronto Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Dr. Heon discussed “What Bardet-Biedl Syndrome teaches us about ciliopathies.” The second was given by Gregory Hageman, PhD, of the John Moran Eye Center, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT. Dr. Hageman described a “New era in the understanding of age-related macular degeneration.” The third plenary lecture was given by Jayakrishna Ambati, MD, of the University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY. Dr. Ambati discussed “Age-related macular degeneration and the other double helix.”

We thank the outstanding management and staff of the beautiful Fairmont Tremblant Hotel for all of their assistance in making this an exceptionally smooth-running conference and a truly memorable experience for all of the attendees. These included, in particular, Isabelle Gilbert, Émilie Normandeau, and Patrick Skelly. We also thank Jonathan Marier of AVW-TELAV for providing audio/visual equipment and services that resulted in a flawless flow of platform presentations. Lastly, we thank Steven LeFort and, particularly, Marie-Chantal Thibault of JPdL Tremblant.
for their planning and implementing transportation of most of the attendees to and from Montreal and the meeting venue in Mont-Tremblant, as well as all aspects of the end-of-meeting Gala at the beautiful “Summit” overlooking Mont-Tremblant and the majestic Laurentian mountains, with a truly Canadian meal, music, and festivities.

The Symposium received international financial support from a number of organizations. We are particularly pleased to thank The Foundation Fighting Blindness, Columbia, Maryland, for its continuing support of this and all previous biennial Symposia, without which we could not have held these important meetings. In addition, for the fifth time, the National Eye Institute of the National Institutes of Health contributed in a major way to the meeting. In the past, funds from these two organizations allowed us to provide 25–35 Travel Awards to young investigators and trainees working in the field of retinal degenerations. However, the response to the Travel Awards program was extraordinary, with 94 applicants, many more than in the past. For this reason, we sought additional support for the Travel Awards program. The Foundation Fighting Blindness-Canada/Institute of Genetics was a major contributor, and for the first time, we turned to industry sponsors and received generous contributions from Novartis Pharma AG, Alcon, Genentech, Inspire Pharmaceuticals, Pfizer, Inc., Genzyme and Biotigen, Inc. In total, we were able to fund 42 Travel Awards, the largest number ever for these Symposia. Many of the contributing foundations and industry sponsors sent one to several members of their organization to attend the meeting. Their participation and comments in the scientific sessions were instructive to many, offering new perspectives to some of the problems being discussed.

There were two additional “firsts” for the RD Symposia at RD2010. For the first time, there was a commercial exhibitor at the Symposium, Biotigen, which demonstrated its Spectral Domain Ophthalmic Imaging System (OCT) for small laboratory animals; this was highly instructive for many of the attendees. Second, the world-famous Tremblant International Blues Festival (17th Edition) was held during the RD2010 meeting, immediately adjacent to the Fairmont Tremblant venue. With almost continuous free performances every evening of the Symposium, many groups of attendees enjoyed these together after dinner.

We also acknowledge the diligent and outstanding efforts of Ms. Holly Whiteside, who carried out most of the administrative aspects of the RD2010 Symposium, designed and maintained the meeting website, and participated in the production of this volume. Holly is the Administrative Manager of Dr. Anderson’s laboratory at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, and she has become the permanent Coordinator for the Retinal Degeneration Symposia. Her dedicated efforts with the Symposia since RD2000 have provided continuity not available previously, and we are deeply indebted to her. Also, Dr. Michael Matthes in Dr. LaVail’s laboratory played a major role in all aspects in the production of this volume, along with the assistance of Ms. Kelly Ahern, in Dr. LaVail’s laboratory.

Recognizing the need to bring younger individuals into the organizational structure of the RD Symposia, at the RD2008 meeting, we invited Drs. John Ash and Christian Grimm to become members of the organizing committee. Thus, instead of
the rotating head organizer working mostly with Holly Whiteside to organize the meeting and prepare the proceedings volume, Dr. Ash assumed equal responsibility with Dr. LaVail for both efforts for RD2010. Dr. Anderson continued in his role as financial administrator for each of the Symposia, working through the Dean McGee Eye Institute, which generously provides the financial responsibility for the meetings and the mechanism for registration of participants. We were pleased to announce at the Gala at RD2010 that our third new member of the organizing committee is Dr. Cathy Bowes Rickman. Dr. Grimm will work closely with Dr. Hollyfield for the RD2012 meeting to be held in Germany.

Finally, we honor the memory of two colleagues who died during the preparation of the RD2010 meeting in 2009 and 2010. Michael Danciger was a great friend to most who attend our RD meetings. Robert Barlow, likewise, was a long-time attendee of the RD Symposia. Both were outstanding scientists and are missed. We dedicate this volume to Michael and Bob.

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Retinal Degenerative Diseases
LaVail, M.M.; Ash, J.; Anderson, R.E.; Hollyfield, J.G.; Grimm, C. (Eds.)
2012, LXIV, 864 p. 196 illus., 88 illus. in color.,
Hardcover