

AEVR MAY DIABETIC RETINOPATHY BRIEFING

On May 25, the Alliance for Eye and Vision Research (AEVR) recognized May as Healthy Vision Month by hosting its second virtual *Research Saving Sight, Restoring Vision* Congressional Briefing of 2022, entitled: *NEI's Diabetic Retinopathy Clinical Research (DRCR) Retinal Network: Optimizing Treatment for Diabetic Eye Disease Patients*. AEVR's *Research Saving Sight, Restoring Vision Initiative* is a sustained activity to educate about the value of eye and vision research and the enormous strides that National Eye Institute (NEI) funded research has made to establish improvements to diagnosis, treatments, therapies, and outcomes for eye and vision care.



The Briefing featured Lions Clubs International First Vice President, Brian Sheehan, and DRCR Co-Chair, Jennifer Sun MD, MPH (Joslin Diabetes Center/Harvard Medical School).

During the Briefing, Mr. Sheehan highlighted the Lions Clubs *SightFirst* grant program which supports diabetic retinopathy screening and treatment programs, as well as projects that serve patients already diagnosed with the disease worldwide. The mission of the *SightFirst* program is to develop or improve comprehensive eye care systems to fight blindness and vision loss and assist blind and visually impaired people in underserved communities. Mr. Sheehan emphasized that the best way to prevent DR is through monitoring and early detection and treatment of the disease.

Dr. Sun highlighted the strides in outcomes research from the DRCR Network over the past 20 years since its founding in 2002. The network has received funding from the National Eye Institute (NEI) and from the Special Diabetes Program through the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK). This federal investment has been leveraged with private funding from JDRF and private industry to maximize the impact of the network. Between 2003 and 2022, the

DRCR Retina Network conducted 36 multicenter studies, produced 114 publications, and has 137 active clinical sites.

Over the past 20 years, DRCR studies have resulted in significant improvements to clinical interventions and protocols. A unique and important aspect of federally funded research includes the ability to look across multiple therapies and methods and utilize longitudinal data sets which proves valuable in understanding the impact of different interventions.

More recent studies and protocols have worked to understand when to use and when it may not be pertinent to use anti-VEGF therapies and the impacts of anti-VEGF therapies on Proliferative Diabetic Retinopathy (PDR). DRCR research shows that there may be times when a patient has good vision that physicians may be able to hold off on treatment. The data also shows that anti-VEGF treatment is very successful in treating PDR and may reduce the need for some surgical interventions.

The Network continues to advance research to improve outcomes for patients with diabetic retinopathy and other retinal conditions and diseases. Moving forward, the Network is continuing to build on its past research and is also looking at ways to prevent retinal disease, understand the genetic impacts on retinal disease, and is looking at how artificial intelligence, imaging, and big data can play a role in addressing retinal diseases.

AEVR was pleased to be able to host this Congressional Briefing during Healthy Vision Month and thanks Lions Clubs International and the Diabetic Retinopathy Clinical Research Retina Network for sharing their efforts. AEVR also thanks its supporters who helped make this event possible, including:

- Research to Prevent Blindness
- American Society of Retina Specialists
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