



Eye Contact

The National Eye Institute Employee Newsletter



Volume 3, Issue 1

February 2009

NEI Director's Corner



The federal government is experiencing a period of transition as the new year begins. This includes an NIH leadership change that will affect us here at NEI. In October 2008, Dr. Elias Zerhouni stepped down after nearly seven years as

NIH director. Dr. Raynard Kington has been serving as acting director until the new administration names a replacement.

We at NEI benefitted immensely under the leadership of Dr. Zerhouni. He championed the cause of vision science in keynote addresses and Congressional testimony in which he mentioned results from the Age-Related Eye Disease Study, the association of complement factor H gene polymorphisms in age-related macular degeneration, and NEI scientists' use of the latest human genome map.

As NIH director, Dr. Zerhouni also helped launch the NIH Roadmap for Medical Research. This includes the Nanomedicine Initiative for which NEI serves as the lead institute. Grants based on this Initiative will support the engineering of light-sensitive nerve cells in the inner retina.

In addition, IC directors formed the NIH Neuroscience Blueprint under Dr. Zerhouni. This trans-NIH program facilitated NEI participation in research involving neural circuit development, probes for monitoring brain plasticity, and methods for drug-delivery to the central nervous system.

Dr. Zerhouni leaves a lasting legacy marked by these accomplishments. We hope that the future leadership will continue to maintain a similar dedication toward vision research.

While the NIH experiences a major transition this year, the NEI also marks a significant turning point. We will move into our fifth decade of vision science research as we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the institute. NEI

was established by Congress in 1968 and given the charge of preserving the vision of the American people.

An April 3 anniversary kickoff celebration will be held on campus for all NIH employees, and campus banners will showcase this milestone as well. Additional 2009 events will include two symposia that will address the topics of genetics and neuroscience research at NEI.

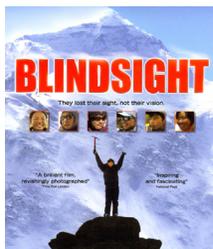
I look forward to commemorating this occasion with you at events throughout the year.

The National Eye Institute's 40th Anniversary

April 3, 2009, is the 40th anniversary of the first National Advisory Eye Council meeting.

Mark your calendars and join in the celebration!

CALENDAR OF EVENTS



Film and Discussion

Friday, April 3, 2009
1:00 p.m.–4:00 p.m.
Lipsett Amphitheatre

NEI will host an NIH-wide event featuring the showing of *BLINDSIGHT*—the award-winning documentary film. *BLINDSIGHT* features Erik Weihenmayer, a blind mountain climber who embarked on an extraordinary expedition up Lhakpa Ri, a peak

(continued on the bottom of page 3)

In This Issue

NEI Director's Corner.... 1	LambLog..... 5
Spotlight On..... 2	MPAB Focal Point 6
Technically Speaking 4	Eye on Health 7



William R. O'Donnell

Ten days after he retired from the United States Army, William R. O'Donnell began working at the National Eye Institute. William R. O'Donnell, better known as Russ, serves as Chief of the Clinical Operations Branch. Russ came to NEI in 1997 after serving

in the Army Medical Department for 24 years. There he managed two of the largest ophthalmology departments and later served on the operations staff of the North Atlantic Regional Medical Command. In addition to starting a new career, he began attending the University of Maryland, University College, where he earned a Master of Science in Health Care Administration and a Master of Business Administration. He is currently pursuing a Doctorate in Management.

Along with supervising and managing the four sections of the Clinical Operations Branch, Russ provides clinical management advice, support, and assistance to the Office of the Clinical Director and the Division of Epidemiology and Clinical Applications, as well as the Scientific Director and NEI Director. His major focus is to provide the tools and resources required for clinical investigators to conduct safe and quality research.

On most weekends, you can find Russ in his other profession as stable hand doing chores around the farm. The stable provides boarding and riding lessons for horse owners and gives Russ the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors and get plenty of physical activity. When time permits, he can also be seen enjoying himself on the water in his 19-foot boat or hiking the many Civil War battlefields in the area.



Andrew P. Mariani

Andrew P. Mariani, Ph.D., has recently been named executive secretary of the National Advisory Eye Council. Since 2001, Dr. Mariani has been a program director in the Division of Extramural Research serving as group leader of the Fundamental

Retinal Processes Program and managing a portfolio of research grants on photoreceptors, photo transduction, retinal pigment epithelium, retinal neuroscience, vitreous disorders and detachment, and cancer. In 2002, he successfully completed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Senior Leadership Program at the University of Maryland School of Public Policy. He has been active in

the NIH community serving on various NEI and trans-NIH committees and was a member of the MEO (Most Efficient Organization) Team that designed and wrote the winning bid for the contract to provide extramural support functions to all of NIH, keeping hundreds of NIH support jobs from being outsourced to contractors.

The executive secretary is a federal employee also known as the "Designated Federal Official" who must be present at the meeting, and in accordance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), approves agendas, calls, attends, and adjourns advisory council meetings, maintains records on cost and membership, ensures efficient operations, and maintains records for availability to the public.

Congratulations Andy!

Clarification

In the December 2008 issue there were two errors noted. First, "Workshop for NIH Children's Inn" on page 4, bottom right photo, listed the first person as "Augustino Buono," the correct spelling is, "Agostino Buono." Second, "New Employee" on page 3, listed the names incorrectly. It should have read, "Henry Wiley, Anthony Headen, and H. Nida Sen."

Eye Contact is an employee newsletter. The goal of the newsletter is to inform, educate, and enlighten (and sometimes even entertain) the NEI community.

It is distributed six times a year every other month. If you would like to submit an article, report an error, or send a comment, please e-mail neieyecontact@nei.nih.gov. For submission guidelines, visit <http://neinet.nei.nih.gov/news/Eyecontact.asp>.



“OxCam” Program

Thomas Johnson and Willie Siu are part of an elite research group at NEI. In fact, they are its only two members.



Thomas Johnson

Both participate in the NIH-Oxford-Cambridge Scholars Program, known as “OxCam,” which allows outstanding science students to perform biomedical research jointly at NIH and either Oxford or Cambridge University in the United Kingdom. The OxCam Program is a subset of the NIH Graduate Partnerships Program, which links NIH to universities in the U.S. and abroad for graduate student training.



Willie Siu

Students who complete the program are awarded either a D.Phil. or a Ph.D. in science from their British university. They can also choose to pursue a combined M.D./Ph.D., as both Siu and Johnson have elected to do.

Siu entered the program in 2006 after completing two years of medical school at the University of California, Los Angeles, and participating in a Howard Hughes Medical Institute-NIH fellowship in the lab of Robert

B. Nussenblatt, M.D., M.P.H., head of NEI’s Clinical Immunology Section and Chief of the Laboratory of Immunology.

Siu is currently working on uveitis research at NEI, and says that the OxCam program has completely changed his choice of profession. “Dr. Nussenblatt introduced me to combining a career in basic science and clinical medicine,” he says. “I don’t think I would have been confident enough to believe that I could run a basic science lab in the future if I hadn’t been in this program.”

Johnson began the OxCam program in 2007, while he was already pursuing his Ph.D. at Cambridge University. He will continue with his M.D. after completing research with Stanislav Tomarev, Ph.D., in the Molecular Mechanisms of Glaucoma Section of NEI’s Laboratory of Molecular and Developmental Biology.

Johnson, whose research project involves using stem cell therapies as treatments for retinal diseases, describes the atmosphere at NIH as complementary to his time at Cambridge. He had access to a world-class academic institution in the neuroscience department there, and transitioned to ophthalmology research in a medically oriented environment here at NEI.

“At NIH, you can observe the entire process by which basic scientific discoveries are translated into clinical therapies,” Johnson says.

[NEI 40th Anniversary Save the Dates! \(continued\)](#)

alongside Mount Everest, with six blind Tibetan students. Prior to this journey, Erik worked with NEI-supported scientists in the development of BrainPort, an apparatus in which a head-mounted camera sends electronic signals to the tongue and then to the brain to provide a “visual field” for a visually impaired person. Using BrainPort, Erik was the first blind man to summit Mount Everest. At this event, Erik will introduce the film and present attendees with an autographed copy of his book *TOUCH THE TOP OF THE WORLD*.

Eye to the Future Symposia Series

Five symposia open to the scientific community will highlight the past, present, and future of our research enterprise. The symposia will focus on the commonalities between vision science and other biomedical disciplines and explore innovative and novel directions that can

expedite the pace of discovery, facilitating treatments, and cures of blinding diseases.

Symposium

Friday, April 17, 2009

8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m.

Lipsett Amphitheatre

Genes and Genomics in Vision will examine current exciting exploits in genetics and genomics, and their impact on vision research by bringing together geneticists, biologists, clinicians, and clinical scientists.

Upcoming Symposia

Spring/Summer 2009: Optical Coherence Tomography

Late Winter 2009: Neuroscience and Vision

Spring 2010: “Focus” on Glaucoma

Fall 2010: Novel Therapeutic Paradigms and Blindness



Practice Safe and Secure Online Shopping!

Here are some useful tips to ensure that your experience is a safe one!

Know who you are dealing with. Please be vigilant of counterfeit and malicious websites. Sometimes links that are shown in an e-mail will send users to websites with unsafe, malicious software that can do harm to your computer or steal financial information. In this case, you may think you are going to be linked to one site, but end up at another—it may even look very much like a legitimate website. If you get an e-mail or pop-up message while browsing that asks for financial information, don't reply or click on the link in the message. Remember that legitimate companies don't ask for financial information via e-mail.

Know exactly what you are buying. Carefully read the seller's description of the product (especially the fine print). If you see name brands with "too good to be true" prices, they might be counterfeit.

Pay by credit or charge card because your online transaction will be protected by the Fair Credit Billing Act. This law gives you the right to dispute charges and under certain circumstances withhold payment while your creditor is investigating your claim. If there is an unauthorized charge, you may only be liable for the first \$50. Check out the company's online shopping guarantee, warranty, return, and/or purchase protection benefits.

Know exactly what the purchase will cost. Check out websites that offer price comparisons and compare

"apples to apples." Don't forget to factor shipping and handling, as well as any applicable sales tax, into the total cost.

Check out the terms of the purchase and keep a paper trail. Pay attention to refund policies and delivery dates. Print and save records of every online transaction (including the product description, online receipts, and e-mails sent or received from the seller. Review your credit card statements and be on the lookout for unauthorized charges.

Never e-mail financial information. Because e-mail is not secure, you should not include information like your credit card, checking account or Social Security number in a message. If you are providing your financial information through a vendor's website, look for indicators that the site is secure, for example, a lock icon in the browser's status bar and/or a URL website address that begins with "https:" where the "s" stands for "secure." Be aware that no indicator is foolproof; some fraudulent sites have forged security icons. It's advisable that you stick to using only trusted websites.

Review the privacy policy. This tells you what personal information the website is collecting and why and how it will be used. If you can't find or understand the policy, consider taking your business to a site that is more consumer-friendly.

Reprinted by permission from the NIH Office of the Chief Information Officer.

Informatics Resources

A new Informatics Resources webpage has been created by Cynthia Jaworski, with the help of Katherine Peterson, Patee Gesuwan, and Graeme Wistow. It is designed to help NEI researchers locate software and tools for molecular biology. The directory is task-oriented, with brief descriptions of each item. The list is not comprehensive; rather, these are programs and databases that have been found to be particularly useful. Most important, all are available directly through Internet links or licenses purchased by NEI or NIH.

The Informatics Resources page can be found at the following URL: <http://neibank.nei.nih.gov/resources/resources.shtml> or reached from the NEI Bank home page under Informatics Resources. If you need more information regarding the webpage, contact Cynthia Jaworski, LRCMB, 301-496-1396 or Jaworski@helix.nih.gov.

You Don't Have to Be Crazy to Work Here, We'll Train You

I am quietly proud that the National Eye Institute (NEI) was able to report 100 percent compliance for the MANDATORY Annual Government Ethics Training. As is so often the case with such endeavors, the last 5 percent ate up 80 percent of the effort for the central office. Thank you all for taking the training. Many ICs had less than full compliance and had to report employees on a deficiency list to Dr. Kington. (This is not a good career placement.)

This particular MANDATORY event generated a series of valuable conversations between various NEI staff members and me. I suspect that many others share the same concerns, comments, and confusion. So, here is a brief synopsis:

In my opinion, the quality of this training was not stellar. If I must watch and listen to a talking head I want Morgan Freeman, not a rat. This course can be blamed on "them." The presentation was produced at the department, and was targeted to a broader set of agencies than just the NIH. Joram suggested that I take some responsibility and fix this. Upon looking into the matter, I have discovered that the regulations permit an op div to substitute local training for the standard. I am willing to offer NEI staff members an alternative next year. Please note that this sacrifices the flexibility of taking online training at a time and place of the employee's choosing. I envision having both options available.

The world of required training at the NIH is complex. The annual training modules that an employee must take vary with the individual's roles and responsibilities. There is a website that tries to be helpful, <http://mandatorytraining.nih.gov/>. I found the "POSITION STATUS" and the "SUPERVISORY STATUS" screens to be relatively straightforward and they both include definitions for the categories. "JOB ACTIVITIES" was more of a challenge. What is a warrant? Who among us has unlimited purchasing authority anyway? I could work the boxes to find myself responsible for 58 mandatory courses, or I could pare it down to 13. However, the site does offer a link for you to take courses online.

There is mandatory training and then there is MANDATORY. Central NEI considers three annual training events as MANDATORY: computer security, government ethics, and NIH NoFEAR Act Training. These three are programmatically significant. Individuals



who complete the courses are tracked via a reliable system. Compliance must be reported to the central NIH leadership, and compliance is recorded as a performance measure for NEI leadership. Therefore, we nag you about them. For this ethics training, NEI employees received two general e-mails at the start of the six-week window. During the last two weeks those who did not take the course received three e-mail reminders along with a copy to their supervisors. On the last morning our Executive Officer made individualized phone calls or left e-mail messages. If an NEI employee still did not take the MANDATORY training, NEI blocked their e-mail access until they complied. This was exhausting to all involved. I will happily entertain all suggestions for making this process easier for everybody.

To further confuse matters, the MANDATORY ethics training is required for only a subset of NEI employees: all Civil Service and Commissioned Corps employees, including employees in the General Schedule, Federal Wage System, Senior Executive/Scientific Service, Senior Biomedical Research Service, Senior Level/Senior Technical, employees appointed under Title 42, and persons working at NIH under Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) assignments, both detailees and appointees. This MANDATORY training is not required of Fellows, guest workers, contractors, or volunteers.

In contrast, the recent mandatory, in-person Ethics Case Training involved all scientific staff: senior investigators, senior scientists, tenure-track investigators, staff scientists, clinicians, postdocs, postbacs, graduate students, scientific staff, and technicians. This was "requested" by Dr. Gottesman's office, not by the Government Ethics folks. I sat in on one of the sessions; it was excellent.

Loré Anne McNicol
Acting Deputy Director



Do Others Really Understand What You Are Saying?



When it comes to sharing information, we all have a lot to say. You know what your message is, but how can you be sure that your audience gets it?

Writing clearly and effectively for your audience, no matter who it may be, is a fine skill that anyone

can learn. It's important to convey information clearly so it can be understood the first time it is read or heard. Written material is clearly communicated if members of your audience can:

- Find what they need.
- Understand what they find.
- Use what they find to meet their needs.

There are many writing techniques you can use to help achieve this goal. Among the most common are:

- Organizing a document logically with the reader in mind.
- Using "you" and other pronouns.
- Maintaining active voice.
- Keeping sentences short.
- Choosing common, everyday words.
- Employing easy-to-read design features.

There is no single technique for ensuring clear communication. But pay attention to the results of your writing—your audience should find it easy to read, understand, and use.

For more information and tips on writing clearly, visit the Intranet at <http://neinet.nei.nih.gov/workresources/CommCorner.asp>.

MPAB Focal Point



Dedicated to Energy Conservation

In an effort to conserve energy, NEI Green Team has a Paper Reduction Project underway. This project was initiated after an NEI employee's suggestion to reduce the number of routine periodical documents (NIH Record, R&W Newsletter, etc.) that are delivered to each employee. Here is a breakdown of the results and ongoing actions at NEI:

- Working with mailroom staff members to develop an effective plan aimed at limiting the number of periodical documents being delivered to labs and offices, ultimately reducing the number of printed copies at the printing source.
- Identifying key "common areas" where a limited number of periodical documents can be delivered, viewed, and shared among employees.
- Researching whether or not particular documents have automatic reminders that are sent via e-mail whenever new editions are posted on the Internet.

- Creating a directory on the NEI Intranet that will be easily assessable and will highlight various periodical documents.

For more information, contact Nicole Rohloff, NEI Green Team Lead, at 301-496-1396 or rohloffn@mail.nih.gov.



NEI Green Team (left to right): Dr. Cheng-Rong Yu, Nicole Rohloff, Alicia Zetina, and Dr. Robert Weichbrod. Not pictured: Dr. Michael Steinmetz.



Deep Breathing for Relaxation



Unless you're exercising, giving birth, having an asthma attack, or taking a few deep breaths so your doctor can listen to your chest, chances are you never really pay attention to how you breathe. But breathing, particularly deep breathing, can be a great tool for relaxation and stress relief.

In stressful situations, be it sitting in traffic, heading to a dreaded meeting, waiting for test results, or getting ready to give a presentation, you may not realize that your breathing is shallow, your pulse rate is high, and your chest feels a little tight. Deep breathing can help you relax, slow your pulse rate, and can also be quite calming.

How to Breathe for Relaxation:

- Sit comfortably with your feet flat on the floor and close your eyes.
- Take a normal breath.
- Put one hand on your abdomen just under your belly button.
- Take a deep breath, inhaling through your nose until you can't take in any more air (you should feel your abdomen expand like a balloon filling with air).
- Hold it for a count of three.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth (your abdomen should start going down like a balloon losing air) until you get all the air out.
- Repeat for a few minutes.

This exercise is just one example of a simple deep breathing technique you can do to help yourself relax. After you learn to control and slow your breathing, you can incorporate other exercises such as imagery or meditation.

Question

We asked a couple of NEI employees the following question, "If you were stuck on an island, what things would you want with you?" Here are their replies:



Agostino "Tino" Buono—
Information Technology

Answer: Cold drink, nice companion, and Italian food.

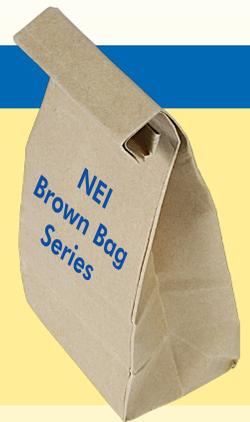


Allyson Collins—
Office of Communication

Answer: Photo albums, a camera, and a few good books.

Save the Date!

The next Brown Bag Seminar is scheduled for Thursday, March 5, Building 31, 6th floor, C wing conference room from 12:00–1:00 p.m. The guest speaker will be announced at a later date. Please mark your calendars.



Challenge

Where can you order NEI resources, publications, and promotional materials? If you know the answer, please e-mail the URL to neieyecontact@nei.nih.gov.

