

The ***Visionary***

THE EYE CANCER FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER | FALL 2018

“Saving
sight,
saving
lives”

®

Inside the issue:

- The Global Fight Against Retinoblastoma
- A Study on the Effects of Topical Chemotherapy
- Lifestyle Changes that May Help in Cancer Prevention
- Rare Eye Cancer Found in 36 Auburn University Students
- Maureen’s Journey through Ocular Melanoma
- The Eye Cancer Foundation Annual



***International
Collaboration***



***The Latest
Studies***

The Global Fight Against Retinoblastoma

The 2020 Campaign aims to place 20 ophthalmic oncologists, fellowship-trained in retinoblastoma treatment, in unserved countries by the year 2020. The Eye Cancer Foundation (ECF), in partnership with the International Council of Ophthalmology (ICO), enable doctors from unserved and underserved countries to be trained in the treatment of retinoblastoma. After six months of training, doctors return to their home country with the goal of establishing specialized departments for eye cancer treatment.

Why is this so **CRUCIAL** these countries? Well, in fact, retinoblastoma is the most common eye cancer in children, and affects approximately 8,200 children each year. In the United States, the survival rate reaches beyond an astounding 96%. In developing countries, however, more than 70% of the children will die from metastatic RB cancer. In areas where



Dr. Santosh G. Hanovar, (left), and Fellow Dr. Milly Shakoor (right)
Upon completion of her fellowship, Dr. Shakoor promises to provide eye cancer treatment to her home country, Bangladesh, saving the lives of children unable to travel to a treatment center.

children and families have no means of traveling to treatment centers, these afflicted children often endure their disease untreated, which eventually leads to death. Because no one should have to suffer such losses, the ECF launched the 2020 Campaign, and succeeded in providing treatment to countless unserved countries. **With your continued support, we will forever strive to establish eye cancer clinics around the world,** and someday push the survival rate for retinoblastoma to 100%.

TIP!

**THINK OF
SUNGLASSES
AS**

SUNBLOCK
FOR YOUR EYES™

Many of us realize that **skin cancer** can often arise from dangerous exposure to ultraviolet (UV) sunlight. But did you know that skin cancer and eye cancer, a lesser-known type of cancer, are closely linked? Just like sunblock to protect our skin, we must realize the importance of UV-blocking sunglasses to protect our eyes.

“Think of sunglasses as sunblock for your eyes”®, Dr. Finger says. He recommends sunglasses with 100% UV protection to shield your eyes.

Is Surgery Really Necessary?



Dr. Sonal S. Chaugule gained a wealth of knowledge as an Eye Cancer Foundation (ECF) fellow under the tutelage of Dr. Paul T. Finger at the NYECC. Some of that knowledge will be disseminated in her paper, “*Topical chemotherapy for giant ocular surface squamous neoplasia of the conjunctiva and cornea: **Is surgery necessary?***”, in collaboration with Dr. J. Park and Dr. Paul Finger, which was presented at the 2017 American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) Meeting.

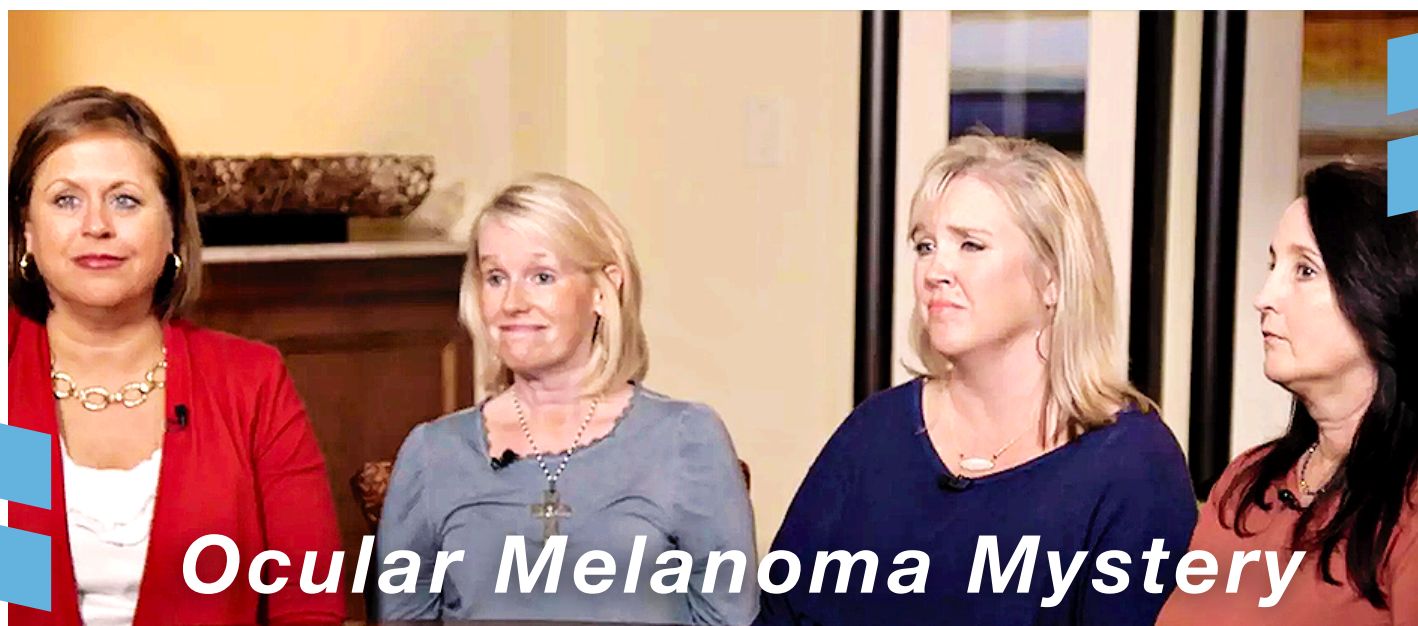
The paper was published by the Indian Journal of Ophthalmology in 2018. Research showed that even large squamous cancers of the conjunctiva can be cured with chemotherapy eye drops alone (no surgery). The drops had marvelous results: no evidence of vision-limiting complications, no tumor recurrences, and no patients required additional treatment for their giant OSSN. For all patients in the study, their cancer was cured, proving to researchers that topical chemotherapy drops were not only safe, but effective as treatment for “giant” OSSN.

Dr. Finger's Practices in Prevention

As of yet, there are no proven ways to prevent or stave off cancer. However, you can always fortify your immune system, enhancing your body's built-in healing system:

1. Eat antioxidant-rich foods, such as leafy greens and berries.
2. Mild exercise, 20 minutes every other day.
3. Decrease your stress levels! – Cortisol, a stress hormone, is also an immunosuppressant. Visit our website for tricks and tips to stay stress-free.





Ocular Melanoma Mystery

With **87,110 estimated diagnoses** in the U.S. this year, skin cancer, is the most frequently diagnosed cancer in the United States. Ocular melanomas, however, remain uncommonly diagnosed, affecting just six in every one million people a year. Given the extreme rarity of ocular melanomas, doctors and researchers were shocked to find this disease in highly concentrated numbers in two states. A total of 36 people – all graduates from Auburn University, Alabama – were diagnosed with ocular melanoma. From Huntersville, North Carolina, 18 patients were also found out to have the same disease.

Juleigh Green and her colleagues at Auburn University discovered they had been diagnosed with the same rare disease.

Juleigh Green was the first among her friends to be diagnosed. Just

27 at the time, Green was experiencing strange flashes of light obstructing her vision and consulted her ophthalmologist



Juleigh Green, post-operation

immediately. **In an interview with CBS**, Green explains her shock upon what they found:

"[My doctor] said, 'There's a mass there, there's something there, I don't know what it is, but it looks like it could be, you know, a tumor,'" Green said.

"It's like you had the breath knocked out of you, you know?"

Four Auburn University Alumni were treated at Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center, and the incidence left Oncologist Dr. Orloff baffled.

"Most people don't know anyone with this disease," Dr. Orloff said. "We said, 'OK, these girls were in this location, they were all definitively diagnosed with this very rare cancer – **what's going on?**'"

Researchers at Kimmel Center immediately began to investigate this bizarre case. Thus far, the Alabama Department of Health states that "it would be premature to determine that a cancer cluster exists in the area". Officials at Auburn University hope that research will help illuminate the cause of this rare cancer appearing at such high concentrations in Alabama and North Carolina.

Patient Stories: Maureen's Journey

In December 1994, I went to see my optometrist for a routine eye exam. During the exam, she took a bit more time than she usually would with the right eye. Afterward, she wrote out a note, put it in a sealed envelope, and said that I should see my ophthalmologist. That was the beginning.

Upon consulting my ophthalmologist, I discovered that the little freckle that my optometrist luckily noticed was possibly cancerous, and would have to be monitored. In May 1995, I went for what I thought would be another routine visit at the ophthalmologist. **It was not routine.** After the exam, he asked his receptionist to see if Dr. Finger was in the hospital that day. Thankfully, he was, and I was sent down to his office at the New York Eye and Ear Infirmary. It was only when I saw the words Melanoma Study beside the door that I actually realized: Ah. Not just cancer, but melanoma.

In the blink of an eye, so to speak, life changed.

NEW!

“In the blink of an eye, so to speak, life changed.”

My operation with Dr. Finger was on December 5th, 1995. I was released eight days later, on St. Lucy's Day - Santa Lucia - the day celebrated as the festival of light. From my room I had a view of the Empire State lit up for Christmas, and I still see that building out of my office window every day - with both eyes.

I am fortunate to have had a good recovery and to have retained all of my eyesight. As I say, so far so good, and still, I go to each 6 month follow up with caution. I don't think anyone would be arrogant enough to forget the trauma. I am grateful to this day to the two patients whom Dr. Finger put me in touch with, who spoke to me before my treatment and shared their experiences. Only someone who has been there truly knows what the experience feels like. I have made two wonderful friends who took the road after I did.

Meeting with the fine, young doctors who are being trained through The Eye Cancer Foundation especially is truly inspiring. And I know that patients today have a wide support network with people who share so generously and bravely.

The Eye Cancer Foundation Annual Appeal

As we reflect on 2018, there is much to celebrate! The Eye Cancer Foundation community should be proud of our unity, generosity and love. This has been a year of great ECF accomplishments, supporting both eye cancer research and training.

With your help we found the best possible eye cancer fellowship candidates from: Egypt, India, Bangladesh, Congo, Vietnam and brought them to high-quality, low-cost training centers to learn treatment for retinoblastoma. Up to 70% of children (<3 years of age) with retinoblastoma in those countries will die from their disease. However, we know that early intervention and prompt treatment can save almost all of them. The ECF's partnership with The International Council of Ophthalmology (ICO) helps insure the quality of training these fellows receive. It is through your support that these fellowships were established with success, and because of this, children who were born to less fortunate circumstances have a chance for both vision and life. Additionally, this year alone, we have supported twelve published research projects to further knowledge and enhance treatment of eye cancer.

The ECF has made a commitment to provide research, training, and support for qualified doctors from unserved and underserved countries. We simply cannot stand idly by while eye cancer patients die just due to lack of specialty care.

The achievements of this year have served as poignant reminders that hard work and focused philanthropy can create great progress. None of this could be done without our patrons, and for this, we at The ECF are extremely grateful.

Please send the ECF a gift today to demonstrate your dedication to supporting a deeply important effort to promote multi-center and international cooperation in ophthalmic oncology. Your gift today will save both vision and lives here in the USA and all over the world. With so much to look forward to, The ECF team hopes they can count on your support.

Together, we can save lives.

Best personal wishes,

Paul T. Finger, MD

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