Letters

Progress for Ophthalmic Research

It was a pleasure to read "Why Advocate for Increased Research Funding?" (Opinion, December), in which Dr. Ruth Williams crystallized the many reasons for society to invest in vision research. Basic and translational research underpins development of the treatments that future ophthalmologists will use to help patients. The completion of the human genome code in 2001 provided powerful new tools and approaches that are speeding our progress along.

I also quite liked the verbal efficiency and clarity used to describe the funding environment. Medical research overall has done well in recent years. Unfortunately, much of this funding is still devoted to erasing the sparse funding environment of the previous decade, and the current buying power of the NEI budget is mired at levels equivalent to nearly two decades ago (2000-2002).

As Dr. Williams noted about the BRAIN Initiative, vision research is also front and center in trans-NIH fundamental research in neuroscience. The BRAIN Initiative currently receives nearly $400 million in annual support. Of that amount, 42% goes into projects involving retinal neural-circuitry and brain central visual processing and projects involving vision researchers who are on BRAIN project teams. This is remarkable and emphasizes the importance of the visual system, both retina and brain, in neuroscience research.

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On the translational side, I am glad the NEI Audacious Goals Initiative in Regenerative Medicine is moving quickly toward cell therapy, gene therapy, and retinal cell replacement therapies for age-related macular degeneration and glaucomatous vision loss.

This editorial helps all of us as ophthalmologists celebrate the work that astute ophthalmic clinicians, basic scientists, and clinician-scientists are accomplishing.

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