HOPE in FOCUS
Seeing a cure for blindness
Supporting the LCA and rare retinal disease community

SEEING HOPE | Newsletter

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Second Global *RDH12* Scientific Conference



Moving Closer to Successful Clinical Trials for People Living with LCA13 (*RDH12*)

By Rosanne Smyle

The community of people living with Leber congenital amaurosis caused by mutations in the *RDH12* gene moved closer to realizing its shared goal of establishing a clinical trial to find a treatment for the blinding disease.

More than 40 people, including a representative from Hope in Focus, gathered for the Second Global *RDH12* Scientific Conference in Baltimore. The daylong meeting in November offered perspectives from clinicians, patients, parents, advocates, academia, regulators, and industry.

Silvia Cerolini, founder of Eyes on the Future and mother of 9-year-old Vicky who lives with *RDH12*, said the conference made tremendous progress toward a common goal: Designing a successful clinical trial to find a treatment to improve or stabilize vision in people living with *RDH12*. Current LCA13 *RDH12* research is in preclinical stages, with the hope that the first clinical trials may start in 12 to 24 months.

Key challenges unique to treating *RDH12* mutations include severe impairment of retina/vision from early life, and uncertain expectations of stabilization/preservation versus improvement/ restoration of vision.

As one woman living with *RDH12* voiced during the conference: "*Any* quantity of vision is everything for us."

Coming Together for *RDH12*

Eyes on the Future, based in the United Kingdom, collaborates with *RDH12* Fund

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From the Founder:

Laura Manfre

It's an exciting time here at Hope in Focus as we are immersed in organizing our signature LCA Family Conference coming to you this summer in Indianapolis.

We are so looking forward to seeing you — in person. From June 23 to 24, we're bringing together people living with LCA and other rare inherited retinal diseases to mingle with families, researchers, advocates, educators, doctors, and biotechnology leaders.

Hope in Focus hosted its first LCA Family Conference five years ago — when researchers were conducting only a handful of clinical trials to treat blindness.

More than 30 clinical trials are underway now to find treatments for rare retinal disease, thanks in part to funds raised by Hope in Focus at its gala Dinner in the Dark, which, by the way, also marked its return to an in-person event last fall after a three-year pandemic pause.

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Second Global *RDH12* Scientific Conference

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for Sight in the United States, and Candle in the Dark in Belgium under the umbrella of the Global *RDH12* Alliance. Collectively, the three organizations have raised more than $3.5 million since 2011 to advance research and find treatments.

Retinal International, Foundation Fighting Blindness, and Hope in Focus partnered with the Alliance to present the conference and serve as Patient Representatives. Courtney Coates, our Director of Outreach and Development, attended on behalf of Hope in Focus.

RDH12 Scientific Conference Attendees

Conference highlights included stories from people living with the disease, and the constructive dialogue among industry representatives, clinicians, scientists, and regulators, Coates said.

"Most significant were the *RDH12* patients and parents sharing their experiences with progressive vision loss and their hopes for a treatment," she said. "The day marked a meaningful step toward successful trials, and, hopefully, will become a model as other gene-mutation studies progress to trials."

Cerolini said the *RDH12* community is as close as ever to the first human clinical trials and needs to persevere.

"What we are learning about *RDH12* can help the entire field of inherited retinal dystrophies."

After the gathering, Cerolini submitted a scientific abstract based on the conference to ARVO, the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology. She recently learned the organization accepted her work as an example of patient-driven collaboration to accelerate research.

Patient Perspectives

The group watched a video of children and adults with *RDH12* describing difficulties with sight loss and the hope that research will lead to a treatment.

Coates said people from several countries expressed their desires to have a chance to better their vision or at least maintain it.

"The heartfelt presentation reminded everyone in the room why we were there."

For Maria Fiore, mother of 17-year-old Bella who lives with *RDH12*, the day brought hope.

"The input — from the academic side, opinions from the regulatory side, and the competitive nature of having multiple interests on the industry side — gives me a lot of hope that we're getting closer to an *RDH12* clinical trial," said Fiore, a member of the Board of Directors for *RDH12* Fund for Sight.

"We appear to be closer than ever, and events like the conference help to keep the motivation and drive to bring this to the finish line a real possibility."

Bella and Vicky are part of the global *RDH12* community that includes more than 200 families from 20 countries. Children and adults living with the rare inherited retinal disease hail from the United States, Europe, South America, China, India, and Russia.

Silvia and Vicky

Individuals and their families at the conference comprised a group of nine, sharing worldwide perspectives about trial design and outcome. They said they would accept stabilizing visual function as a "significant win" in the pursuit of a treatment.

Adults with *RDH12* talked about the importance of keeping whatever light perception they have and shared stories of struggles in knowing where they are in their space, including the perils of bumping and bruising their foreheads when navigating spaces.

Their comments led to discussions with regulators and clinicians about the complexities of retinal function and the validity of certain endpoints and outcomes — with all working toward the day when people living with *RDH12* will have the option of a treatment.

Please see www.hopeinfocus.org for complete conference coverage.

From the Founder:

Continued from page 1

We held our last conference in 2019 — about a year before Covid shut down much of the world.

Hope in Focus, with support from the Foundation Fighting Blindness, brought together superstar geneticists and a host of global research and industry experts in Philadelphia. The gathering created myriad opportunities for thoughtful and interactive exchanges of knowledge, ideas, and viewpoints in sessions focused on research, future treatments, advocacy, and people sharing their stories.

We held our first family conference in Mystic, Connecticut, featuring sessions on the importance of the patient voice in developing treatments for blindness, and the long, not-very-straight road researchers and clinical trial participants travel to help bring treatments to market.

We're taking all that we've learned — and it's been a lot over the years since Hope in Focus' founding nearly a decade ago — to the planning table to create an extraordinary event, where you'll meet people and make connections that give hope for the future of finding cures and treatments for blindness.

We look forward to meeting you. Please join us in Indianapolis!

In this edition of *Seeing Hope*, you'll find more conference details, along with LCA research updates. You'll also learn of the progress made by a global scientific alliance toward bringing *RDH12* clinical trials closer to reality, and, from our columnist, you'll read about ways of navigating and advocating in the workplace.

Laura

Global Genes
2023 RARE Advocacy Summit
September 19–20, 2023 • San Diego, CA
globalgenes.org/event/rare-advocacy-summit
Each year, Global Genes convenes one of the world's largest gatherings of rare disease patients, caregivers, advocates, healthcare professionals, researchers, partners, and allies at the RARE Advocacy Summit.

Hope in Focus
Dinner in the Dark
October 14, 2023 • Groton, CT
hopeinfocus.org
Our primary fundraiser for the year, Dinner in the Dark helps fund research to cure blindness caused by LCA, provides support for genetic testing, and drives awareness, education, and connections for LCA and IRD families. Get ready for a stellar menu, fine wines, and a lively sensory adventure.

Foundation Fighting Blindness
VISIONS Conference
June 21–22, 2024 • Chicago, IL
www.fightingblindness.org/events/visions-2024-503
The Foundation's national conference features sessions on research advancements, practical adapting and thriving, and opportunities to connect with the blind and low-vision community. A dynamic actionable program and agenda have been developed in collaboration with the Orphan Disease Center of the University of Pennsylvania.

HOPE IN FOCUS LCA FAMILY CONFERENCE IS BACK — LIVE!

By Rosanne Smyle

Our team at Hope in Focus is filled with joy in the hope we'll be meeting you this summer at our 2023 LCA Family Conference in Indianapolis.

For our community of people living with Leber congenital amaurosis and other rare inherited retinal diseases, it's time to mark your calendars — June 23 to 24 — and make your plans to meet at "the crossroads of America," as Indiana's motto boasts.

It's been way too long since we gathered — four years ago in 2019, even before Covid!

Our third LCA Family Conference promises to be an event not to be missed. Individuals living with LCA, family members, advocates, doctors, researchers, and biotech industry leaders will fill conference space at the Omni Severin Hotel, an historic landmark hotel in downtown Indianapolis.

For details and early registration to receive your discount, please visit www.hopeinfocus.org.

Building on Successful Conferences

Our first conference in 2018 in Mystic, Connecticut, and our second in Philadelphia, created deep friendships and fostered extraordinary connections leading to life-changing experiences.

Laura Manfre, Hope in Focus Co-founder and Board President, said the organization's family conferences are designed to bring information to people living with LCA and their families, and to connect those patients to researchers and industry.

"A huge part of our mission is to make sure members of the rare disease community do not feel alone, and that they are well-informed when it comes to research and the pathway to treatments," Manfre said.

"We hear from people living with LCA all the time that they want to connect with other individuals living with the rare retinal disease, and we hear from researchers and pharma that *they* want and need to talk with those people because the dialogue gives context, perspective, and motivation

for their work and plays a vital role in establishing meaningful endpoints."

We're taking our lessons drawn from our earlier conferences to present another outstanding forum.

Meeting and making connections

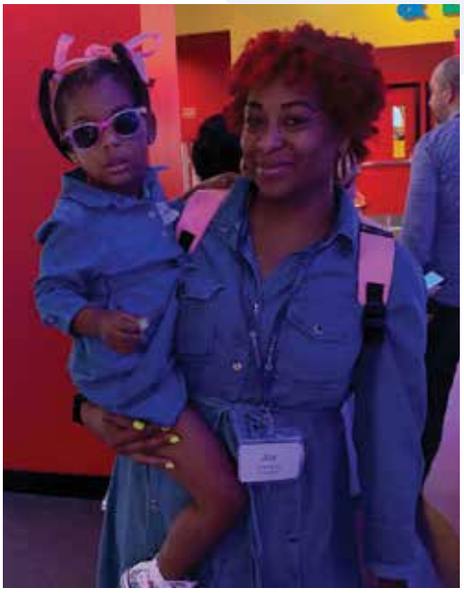
Three generations of one family connected directly with Spark Therapeutics at our 2019 conference and talked about possible treatment for then-4-year-old Jordynn, who has LCA2 (*RPE65*). Spark and a team at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, developers of the only approved gene therapy for an inherited disease, created LUXTURNA®, a treatment shown to improve vision in people living with a mutation in their *RPE65* gene.

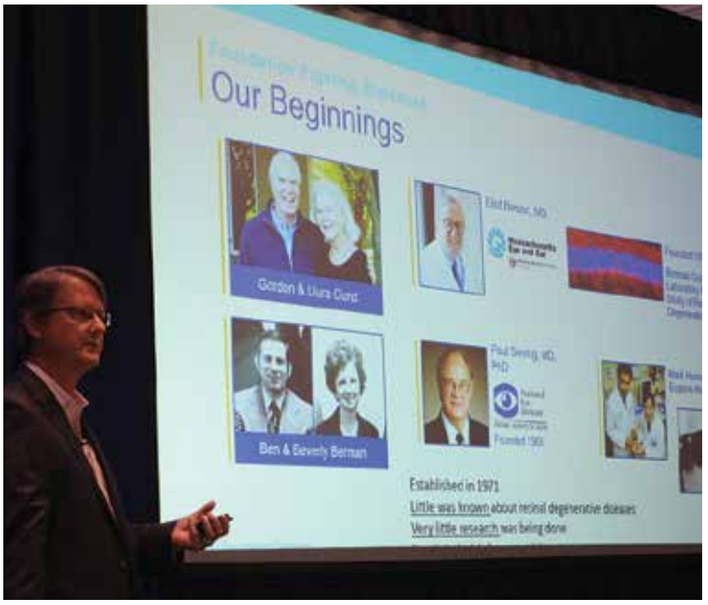
Another family connected with the head of clinical ophthalmology at MeiraGTx, a biotech that developed a special, compassionate use treatment for a form of LCA. They spoke directly with the doctor who discussed his findings in his presentation as a conference panelist. After learning their son Jace had LCA4 (*AIPL1*), the same type of LCA detailed at the meeting, they traveled to the United Kingdom where Jace underwent surgery. His parents believe he gained valuable functional vision from the treatment.

We look forward to hearing your stories of living with rare retinal disease and witnessing your experiences and conference connections with other families, scientists, doctors, advocates, and industry leaders.

Register now at www.hopeinfocus.org and receive your early-bird discount for this extraordinary event.

A sampling of people who participated in our previous LCA Family Conferences





Encouraging News from Clinical-Trial Frontlines

Ben Shaberman
Vice President,
Science Communications
Foundation Fighting Blindness

It's always important to remember that clinical-trial research evaluates safety and efficacy for potential treatments. While we hope emerging therapies for Leber congenital amaurosis will advance through human studies to gain regulatory approval, many miss their trial endpoints and don't cross the finish line.

Such was the case for two emerging approaches for LCA10 (*CEP290*). While some patients in both trials had vision improvements, the trials did not meet their primary endpoints.

In early 2023, though, we have much to be excited and encouraged about. Here are reports of three companies making timely progress in clinical development of their treatments.

Atsena Therapeutics' LCA1 (*GUCY2D*) Gene Therapy Improves Vision in Phase 1/2 Clinical Trial

Atsena Therapeutics, a gene-therapy development company focused on preventing and reversing blindness, announced positive results from its Phase 1/2 gene therapy clinical trial for people with LCA1 caused by mutations in the gene *GUCY2D*. The company reported results for 15 trial participants. Overall, the gene therapy, ATSN-101, was well tolerated.

Kenji Fujita, MD, Atsena's chief medical officer, said, "We're encouraged by these data that demonstrate ATSN-101 improved visual function while maintaining a favorable safety profile. We look forward to launching a pivotal trial for the evaluation of ATSN-101, which will lay the groundwork for successful registration and commercialization."

The biotech also is developing gene therapies for X-linked retinoschisis and Usher syndrome type 1B.

Opus Genetics to Launch Gene Therapy Trial for People Living with LCA5 (lebercillin)

Opus Genetics, a company developing gene therapies for people with inherited retinal diseases (IRDs), has received authorization from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to launch a Phase 1/2 clinical trial for its emerging gene therapy for LCA5, which causes significant vision loss in children with mutations in the gene that expresses the protein lebercillin.

Taking place at the University of Pennsylvania, the trial will be enrolling nine adult patients. Researchers believe gene therapies will be effective for many years, perhaps the life of the patient.

Opus is developing other gene therapies, including a potential treatment for LCA13 caused by mutations in the *RDH12* gene and for LCA9 (*NMNAT1*).

Sparing Vision Receives Authorization to Launch U.S. Clinical Trial for its Cone-Preserving Treatment

SparingVision, a French company developing therapies for ocular conditions, including IRDs, has received FDA authorization to launch a Phase 1/2 clinical trial known as PRODYGY for SPVN06, its gene-independent, cone-preserving therapy for people with retinitis pigmentosa (RP).

The biotech plans to enroll 33 RP patients with disease-causing mutations in *PDE6A*, *PDE6B*, or RHO genes. SPVN06 expresses a protein called rod-derived cone-viability factor (RdCVF), a naturally occurring protein in the retina. The scientists demonstrated that RdCVF prevented or slowed the degeneration of cones. RP initially affects rods, and progressive loss of rods leads to loss of cones. There are currently no RP therapies.

*Visit **FightBlindness.org** to stay informed about the latest research advances for LCA and other IRDs.*

Different Situations Present Different Ways to Disclose Visual Impairment

Jack and his guide dog, Baloo

I got a new job as a Human Resources Manager at a large tech company in 2021. I've learned a lot about navigating work in these last two years as someone with a visual impairment.

My previous role was in a hospital. I went into work every day. Because I saw my colleagues every day, they quickly learned how best to collaborate with me, what I could and could not see, and what things they should verbalize.

My role now is hybrid. I go into the office once per week, at most. This means it has taken much longer for these same things to happen, especially during in-person scenarios. It's true what they say — nothing beats an in-person connection.

This experience has re-highlighted the importance of disclosure to me. When the people around you don't know you are visually impaired, it is impossible for them to adjust their actions to create a more inclusive environment for you.

Since starting my new job, I've been open with my manager and immediate team as it relates to actions they can take to create an inclusive environment for me, including providing documents in an accessible format, saying who is speaking when I am learning to recognize new voices, and describing any relevant visual information that I might not be able to see.

However, in my role, I talk to new people all the time. It is not always relevant or an effective use of time for me to disclose my visual impairment to all these people. To manage these situations, I've taken two approaches.

First, I passively disclose my visual impairment by having a link at the bottom of my email signature that says, "I have a disability: learn how to collaborate with people who are visually impaired." When people click on this link, they are brought to a page of tips on how best to create inclusive working environments for visually impaired people.

Second, if I am in a situation that isn't accessible, I don't wait to speak up. For example, "I can't see your screen share. Do you mind sending me a link to that document instead?"

It was nerve-wracking to leave the job I had for something new, and there have certainly been challenges along the way. Overall, it has been a fantastic experience that has helped me grow and work toward my long-term career goals.

I hope you'll take away two lessons from my experience:

First, don't let comfort hold you back. Be willing to take challenges head-on if they'll help you grow and achieve your goals.

Second, and potentially more importantly for this community, practice advocating for yourself. Get good at articulating what you need from the people around you to be fully included. It can feel daunting, but the more you do it, the easier it becomes and the better you get at it.

Jack McCormick graduated in 2018 from Canada's Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario. He was diagnosed in high school with LCA2 (RPE65). Jack is a Hope in Focus ambassador, helping people living with LCA and IRDs. You can read his blog at ***jackdamccormick.wordpress.com***

Events

DO YOU HAVE AN EVENT YOU WANT TO SHARE? LET US KNOW!
Email rosanne@hopeinfocus.org with the information and a link.

Let's Chat About...
hopeinfocus.org
A new "**L**et's **C**hat **A**bout..." webinar episode is coming soon. Please check our website for our upcoming sessions this spring!

Retinal Cell and Gene Therapy Innovation Summit 2023
April 21, 2023 • New Orleans, LA
www.fightingblindness.org/events/innovation-summit-2023-509
The summit features presentations by leading retinal disease experts on potential gene and stem-cell therapies and how best to deliver them to patients.

Global Genes
RARE Drug Development Symposium 2023
May 1–3, 2023 • Philadelphia, PA
globalgenes.org/event/rare-disease-drug-development
Collaboration is the foundation of success in rare disease research. Knowing who to work with, what strategies to use, and how to prepare for discussions can help you overcome barriers posed by small populations and limited funding.

National Organization for Rare Disorders Living Rare, Living Stronger Patient and Family Forum
May 6, 2023 • Washington DC
rarediseases.org/event/living-rare-living-stronger-patient-and-family-forum
Join NORD's annual forum and learn more about living your best life while navigating your rare disease.

Hope in Focus • LCA Family Conference
June 23–24, 2023 • Indianapolis, IN
hopeinfocus.org
Please join us for our 2023 LCA Family Conference. Here's your opportunity to meet with members of the LCA and IRD communities and bring your questions and experiences directly to the experts. We're gathering a host of families, advocates, educators, doctors, researchers, and biotech industry leaders for our third LCA Family Conference.

Visit our website for more information and early registration for your discount.

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The *Seeing Hope* Newsletter is published quarterly by Hope in Focus, a 501(c)3 patient advocacy organization dedicated to generating awareness, raising funds for research, and providing education and outreach to the LCA and rare inherited retinal disease community.

To learn more about Hope in Focus, visit www.hopeinfocus.org.

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