Vision — and hope — renewed

Physician inspires woman to undergo surgery, restores sight

Renee Montague had all but given up hope for recovering her vision.

In seven years, Montague had endured four invasive eye surgeries, worn 12 sets of contact lenses, and consulted a number of specialists in a fruitless search to regain her sight.

“I was at the end of my rope when I met Dr. Garg,” she recalled.

Sumit (Sam) Garg, MD, serves as the medical director at the UC Irvine Health Gavin Herbert Eye Institute, and the interim co-chair of the Ophthalmology Department at the UC Irvine School of Medicine.

Today Montague, 62, who develops curriculum and training for large corporations, is such an admirer that she calls herself one of “Garg’s groupies.” She has become a donor to the institute and declares that her April 2014 ocular implant surgery restored her confidence, as well as her eyesight.

It all began eight years ago when Montague was watching television and felt a sensation like a rubber band breaking in her right eye. After noticing a transparent yellow...
With Renee, I explained what course of action I thought was best for her and how I had come to that decision. Even so, Montague had reservations and asked a lot of questions. “He doesn’t let his ego get in the way of treating patients,” she noted. “He’s patient, and very truthful. I scheduled the surgery and backed out the first three times. The fourth time, he said, ‘I know you’re scared. All surgeries are risky, but I believe that I can help you.’ And I went ahead.”

When the nurse removed the bandage the following day, Montague could read the eye chart on the wall. She now is able to drive and can read 10-point print. “I’m not as nervous or anxious, on edge, wondering who I’m going to bump into,” she noted. “I’m more confident.”

“I’m so happy for Renee,” Garg said. “When I see her now, I get a big smile. What a great result for such a great person.”

After meeting Garg, Montague said, “I couldn’t see myself putting my sight in the hands of anyone else. When I made my donation to have a brick placed in the institute courtyard, I put ‘Renee Montague: Thank you.’ And I went ahead.”

“Having surgery can be very anxiety provoking for patients,” Garg said. “I try to do my best to alleviate fears by discussing positive but realistic outcomes.

CO-CHAIR MESSAGE

Welcome to the new “Shine the Light.”

Dear friends,

Welcome to the new “Shine the Light,” the community newsletter for the UC Irvine Health Gavin Herbert Eye Institute.

If you are a current supporter of the UC Irvine Health Gavin Herbert Eye Institute, you may have noticed that this publication has a new, updated look. We wanted to reflect the bright future we envision for eye care. If you are receiving this publication for the first time, we welcome you to learn about our services and our commitment to caring for those with vision problems — in Orange County and beyond.

Since opening our new building in 2013, the Gavin Herbert Eye Institute has grown at a record pace. We are treating more patients and exploring more avenues of medical research than ever before.

As we look ahead to 2015, we expect to continue that growth. We will be welcoming new physicians and research faculty and continuing to expand our presence in the community with new initiatives such as the Pediatric Vision Program.

We invite you to join us in our mission by finding us on Facebook, learning more about our programs online, and donating to the institute and 20/20 Society to support our research and clinical innovations.

Thanks to support from community members like you, 2015 will surely set another record in our goal to eradicate blindness by the year 2020.

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Linda Lippa, MD
Cataracts, Cornea, External Disease and Refractive
Marjan Farid, MD
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Clear vision for young children

Foundation gift launches fund to provide free glasses to disadvantaged children

A new program designed to help children with vision problems has received a boost, thanks to a generous donation.

The Pediatric Vision Program provides early vision screening and follow-up care to children from birth to 5 years in preschools throughout Orange County. The program is a $3 million partnership between the Children and Families Commission of Orange County, UC Irvine Health Gavin Herbert Eye Institute and CHOC Children’s. The program has received a $15,000 gift from the Lon V. Smith Foundation that will establish a fund to provide free glasses to disadvantaged children. This is a critical component of the vision program, which will implement new methods and models for pediatric vision services, as well as bolster existing vision services that are supported by the commission.

Leading the effort is Robert Lingua, MD, Gavin Herbert Eye Institute’s director of pediatric ophthalmology. He believes early treatment and monitoring for vision issues in children is an important way to prevent adult vision problems.

“Even though you can focus an eye with a contact lens or eyeglasses, a clear image in the eye cannot be seen by the brain if it has not done so before age 9,” Lingua said.

One in three preschoolers experiences some form of vision difficulty. With proper diagnosis and treatment, 80 percent of eye issues are treatable. But early identification is crucial and many primary care providers do not test small children — or miss the warning signs of vision difficulties.

The Pediatric Vision Program will include a mobile service, delivered by a large vehicle able to drive around and visit schools and other community sites in Orange County to provide vision screening tests. The vehicle will be staffed by medical experts trained to work with children.

The plan for the bus and new screening technologies impressed officers of the Lon V. Smith Foundation, a 63-year-old private organization that has been a longtime benefactor of the Gavin Herbert Eye Institute and many other programs at UC Irvine. The foundation donated $450,000 two decades ago to help build the institute’s ophthalmology laboratories, but today its focus is on providing smaller gifts to multiple organizations that assist under-served children and families.

The foundation’s efforts remain a high priority for family members still involved in its philanthropic giving, including local resident Steve P. Rados. Rados and other foundation board members elected to support the Pediatric Vision Program after learning about it during a recent institute tour.

The Children and Families Commission of Orange County oversees the allocation of funds from Proposition 10, which added a 50-cent tax on tobacco products sold in California to support healthy early childhood development. Almost $29 million was allocated last year to programs that served more than 170,000 young children. Funds help pay for early education, pediatric primary and specialty healthcare, children’s dental care, homeless prevention, and child development programs.

The commission’s goal is to ensure all children under 5 are healthy and ready to learn when they enter school.

To learn more about how you can support the Pediatric Vision Program, contact Janice Briggs, executive director of development, at 949-824-0091 or jbriggs@uci.edu.
**CLINICAL HIGHLIGHT**

**Blobs and floaters may be a sign of retina trouble**

Are you seeing spots? Do squiggles or tiny cobwebs drift across your field of vision?

If so, you may be experiencing a common and usually benign symptom of aging, said UC Irvine Health ophthalmologist Dr. Mitul Mehta.

These shadowy flecks, known as “floaters,” are collagen fibers that cluster in the vitreous humor, a gel-like fluid that fills the eyeball. As we age, the gel begins to shrink and break down, creating threads or specks that cast a shadow on the retina, the light-sensitive lining of the back of the eye.

Sometimes, the shrinking gel can tear the membrane, which can result in part or all of the retina becoming detached from its blood supply at the back of the eyeball, a potentially serious condition that — left untreated — can lead to blindness, says Mehta, a retina specialist with the Gavin Herbert Eye Institute.

“The retina is made up of rods and cones that allow you to see,” he said. “Once they’re damaged, they don’t heal, so you need to reattach the retina to the blood supply as quickly as possible.”

Signs of this more serious condition include a rush of new floaters, flashes of light, a dark curtain or loss of peripheral vision. If you experience any of these symptoms, Mehta says it’s a good idea to have your eyes checked by an ophthalmologist just to be sure the retina is intact and healthy.

To learn more about treatments for detachment of retinas, visit ucirvinehealth.org/detachedretina.

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**RESEARCH UPDATE**

**Groundbreaking research could lead to ocular herpes therapeutic vaccine**

With funding support from the National Institutes of Health and other prestigious organizations, including an ongoing $4.2 million study, Lbachir BenMohamed, PhD, leads the Gavin Herbert Eye Institute’s efforts to develop a therapeutic vaccine to treat and cure the ocular herpes virus.

Left untreated, ocular herpes — a less commonly associated form of the herpes simplex virus most commonly associated with genital lesions and cold sores — can cause blindness. As the institute’s director of cellular and molecular immunology, BenMohamed is a nationally and internationally recognized leader in herpes vaccine development. He also serves as professor of immunology at UC Irvine.

Up to 90 percent of the world’s population is infected with the herpes simplex virus, and 20,000 U.S. residents are diagnosed with ocular herpes every year, BenMohamed said.

The herpes simplex virus, also known as HSV, infects the eyes when individuals rub or touch their eyes after their hands contact other parts of the body containing the virus. When this occurs, the cells of the cornea become infected and the virus travels to the brain, where it infects brain cells. Inside the brain neurons, the virus evades detection by the immune system and can remain dormant (latent) for years until reactivated by such factors as UV exposure or stress. When it becomes active, the virus triggers the immune system to produce specific white cells, called T-cells, that attack and destroy the cornea. Over time, this can lead to complete vision loss. No therapeutic herpes vaccine exists in the market today.

“We need to develop a vaccine to treat both infected and uninfected people,” BenMohamed said. “Ninety percent of adults have latent herpes in their bodies, but thankfully the virus is not activated in everyone.”

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**SPECIAL FEATURE**

**Optical Shop provides full range of vision services**

Whether you need a routine vision test or more specialized care, the Optical Shop at the Gavin Herbert Eye Institute can provide a comprehensive vision exam, and treat many vision problems.

The Optical Shop, located on the first floor of the Gavin Herbert Eye Institute in Irvine, accepts VSP Choice and Signature plans, and some Anthem Blue View and EyeMed Vision Care plans.

Please call us to confirm your insurance plan is accepted before making an appointment: 949-824-3260.
Contact Us

Make an appointment

- **Gavin Herbert Eye Institute**
  850 Health Sciences Road
  Irvine, CA 92697
  *Appointments*: 949-824-2020
  *Optical Shop*: 949-824-3260

- **UC Irvine Medical Center**
  101 The City Drive South, Pavilion II
  Orange, CA 92868
  *Appointments*: 714-456-7183

Make a donation

To learn more about how you can support us, contact Janice Briggs, executive director of development, at 949-824-0091 or jbriggs@uci.edu

Find us online

- ucirvinehealth.org/eye
- eye.uci.edu
- facebook.com/gavinherberteyeinstitute