As we near the holiday season and end of another successful year of research and surgical outcomes, we are thankful for our donors, patients and friends who give our work meaning.

My Fuchs’ Journey

“Many years, oceans of tears, and eight eye surgeries later, I am Fuchs’ free!” These are the celebratory words of patient Marti Rieske from Boulder, CO. Marti agreed graciously to share her story so others may benefit from her experience. Her entire story, My Fuchs’ Journey, can be read in length on our website homepage at www.cornea.org.

Here are just a few excerpts on her transplant experience...

"Within five days my vision was unlike any that I had experienced for at least ten years. Colors were brilliant, and details popped. The trip home was incredible! I drove for many hours and was able to read road signs and the menus in the fast food restaurants where we stopped along the way. Could this be possible? Could I really be seeing this well? Yes!”

On her second surgery...

“I returned to Dr. Price for a DMEK (my eighth eye surgery) on my left eye, the one that had a retina problem. The DMEK on my right eye had gone wonderfully well, but how the left would respond remained a mystery.”

“Again, the DMEK was very successful, and after five days, I was released to return to Colorado. I drove as much as I could because I wanted to enjoy my new eyes and my ability to see what I had been missing for so long. Those long, boring stretches were anything but boring. They were a whole new world that had opened to me. At my one-month follow-up visit, I had achieved 20/20 vision not only in my right eye but in the left as well—the eye that I was told might not ever have workable vision. Thank you, Dr. Price and his staff for miraculously restoring my sight and bringing my Fuchs’ Journey to an end.”

If you would like to share your story, please contact Jessica at 317-814-2993 or email Jessica@cornea.org.

Seeing—Again—is Believing

“As slowly, her world turned to black. Lost to her are the vivid, crystal clear images she remembers from just a few short years ago. Her rainbow of color includes dingy shades of gray. Relying on her damaged eyes, driving is out of the question. And she long ago gave up a good book on a chilly Sunday afternoon.

Carmel resident Frances Dager was losing her precious vision.

“If you would like to share your story, please contact Jessica at 317-814-2993 or email Jessica@cornea.org.

The article goes on to explain, “Fortunately for Frances, The Cornea Research Foundation... helped develop a technique to restore the use of her eyes. Frances successfully underwent a cornea transplant and will be able to once again, enjoy the simple pleasure of seeing and the feeling of being in control of her eyes. Frances Dager courageously endured a cornea transplant and was able to see again, enjoy the simple pleasure of seeing and the feeling of being in control of her eyes. She said, “I am so happy I received a transplant. My eyesight has been slowly deteriorating over such a long period of time that I did not realize all that I have been missing. I am grateful to Dr. Price and the Foundation for the gift of vision.”
Welcome Dr. McKee

Dr. McKee served for six years as an active-duty US Air Force flight surgeon and attained the rank of Major. During this time, he was the medical director of the Aerospace Medicine Clinic and the course director of Top Knife II USAF Flight Surgeon High Performance Aircraft Course at Luke AFB, AZ. He also served as primary care, aviation medicine specialist and hyperbaric specialist for the largest training base in the US Air Force. Prior to this service, Dr. McKee was stationed in Okinawa, Japan, for four years where he served in a combat-ready F-15 Eagle squadron. He was deployed twice in support of Operation Enduring Freedom where he logged numerous combat flight hours in both air superiority and combat search and rescue missions. His commitment to service was recognized with numerous military medals and awards, including a Command Flight Surgeon of the Year distinction. We are fortunate to have his assistance as we continue to further the Foundation’s clinical research initiatives.

“Through Our Eyes” Art Auction & Luncheon raises more than $14,500 for cornea research!

On September 28th, the Foundation hosted the 5th annual Luncheon—with a new, fun art theme! With a goal of raising $12,000, the event featured handcrafted art from professional artists, grateful patients and the visually impaired. Philanthropist and artist Marianne Glick (glickart.com) served as our honorary chair and shared her insights on philanthropy and vision research. Dr. Price provided a research update to a crowd of 100 supporters. The event also featured a photo booth as highlighted with the fun props in the photo to the right.

“We were very fortunate to have a wide variety of wonderful donations of artwork, enthusiastic attendees and financial contributions from those who could not attend”, says Marianne Price, Executive Director. “It was really special to see so many join us in our mission to give people back the use of their eyes. We would like to thank everyone who contributed to the event and recognize our planning committee for all of their hard work.”

Visit our photographer’s website
Go to www.muzikandmemories.photoreflect.com and enter Cornea Research into the search field to view all of the photos from the event!
The improvements we’ve been able to make in cornea transplant techniques over the past decade are almost miraculous! Learning that your cornea is deteriorating can be devastating news. Fortunately, we can now restore vision very rapidly, especially to the many patients who qualify for the DMEK technique in which we replace a single-cell layer lining the back of the cornea through a tiny incision. DMEK patients often notice a dramatic visual improvement within a few days or weeks compared to months or years and can resume normal activities in a matter of weeks! Our center has done the most DMEK surgeries in the world.

In fact, recovery is so rapid with DMEK that we now give patients the option of having a transplant performed in both eyes just one to two weeks apart. This can be very helpful for patients who are coming from a long distance. DMEK can also be combined with cataract surgery to treat lens changes and corneal problems at the same time through the same small surgical incision.

We’ve been excited to find that targeted transplant techniques like DMEK and DALK greatly reduce the risk that the recipient’s body will recognize the donor tissue as being foreign and start to reject it. In over 700 DMEK procedures, we’ve only seen 3 rejection episodes. The risk of rejection was over 10 times higher with older transplant procedures. Once we determined rejection risk was much less, we initiated a two-part study. Part 1—investigate cutting down the steroid strength and with success in that, Part 2—discontinuing steroid usage at one year.

### Part 1: Steroid Comparison
Transplant patients typically use corticosteroid eye drops long-term to prevent graft rejection, but these eye drops have some serious side effects. One of the most common is increased pressure in the eye, which can lead to glaucoma. **We’ve now enrolled 200 DMEK patients in a randomized study to find out whether we can safely cut back on corticosteroid eye drop strength and thereby reduce steroid-associated side effects without increasing the risk of rejection. To date, no one has had a rejection episode with either the standard or the lower strength regimen! Even through topical steroids are the standard of care to prevent cornea transplant rejection this is the first prospective study to compare dosing levels.**

### Part 2: Discontinuing Steroid Usage
Many people would like to quit using the eye drops altogether. The side effects, expense and hassle of remembering to use them daily can be overwhelming. To address these issues, and building upon the successful outcomes of Part 1, we’ve recently initiated Part 2 of this study. **The goal: to see if DMEK patients can safely discontinue corticosteroid eye drop use at one year without undue risk of graft rejection.**

Patients are given a choice to stop or continue using the steroid eye drops. If they choose to stop, we examine them regularly to look for any signs of rejection or increased pressure in the eye.

The prospective positive results of this two-part study are expected to far outweigh the expense of administering it. In total, the two-year study is expected to cost approximately $150,000. **However, if patients can effectively do away with daily steroid use, we feel it is a worthwhile investment and hope you do too.**

All of this cannot be done without the support of our patients and donors. We are thankful for this support, as it has enabled us to continue on this research path. **As we head into the holiday season, we invite you to join us and these initiatives if you have not already done so with your tax-deductible gift. You may use the enclosed envelope or call us at 317-814-2993.**

Thank you for your support!
I had a cornea transplant a few months ago and feel incredibly fortunate that someone donated their cornea so that I may see again. My vision has not been this good in decades and I feel a great need to thank my donor’s family for giving me the gift of sight. Is there a way I could thank them?

Q:

A: Yes, you can share your appreciation. Our office coordinates letters to donor families with the Indiana Lions Eye & Tissue Transplant Bank (ILETTB) and other eye banks. Since all tissue donations are anonymous, the eye bank provides a code for each donor when they send the tissue for your transplant. This code is then placed in your medical record. When you send a letter, our office sends it along to the eye bank with your unique donor code. The eye bank then identifies the family based on that code and passes on your letter to the next of kin.

ILETTB suggests that since donor families grieve in different ways, your letter should be sensitive to their loss. You may include information about yourself, your family, your life and hobbies without using your full name or address for confidentiality purposes. Learn more at www.indianalionseyebank.org/bereavement.html.

Thank you for your continued interest! All donations to the Foundation are tax-deductible and support our sight-restoring research.