



DISCOVERY

THE DISCOVERY EYE FOUNDATION



The Discovery Eye Foundation supports cutting-edge research related to sight-threatening eye diseases and their treatments.

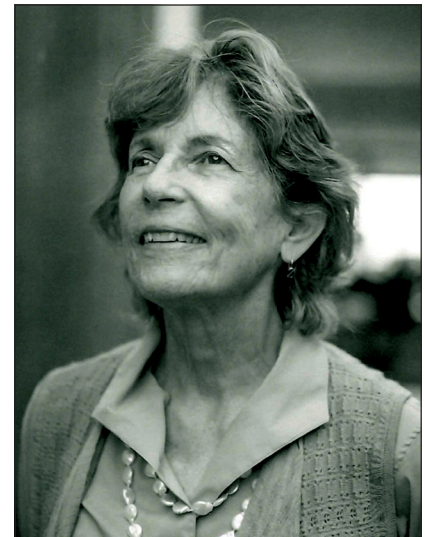
Spring 2024

DEF Pays Tribute to Dr. M. Cristina Kenney

Discovery Eye Foundation Research Director Dr. M. Cristina Kenney died on Dec. 21, 2023, at the age of 74. Cris was many things, all at once, but her passion, warmth, intelligence and deep empathy shone through in every aspect of her very well-lived life.

Groundbreaking physician-scientist

Cris earned her BA in biology and chemistry at the University of New Mexico, her PhD in anatomy and biochemistry at the University of Arizona, and her MD at UCLA, where she received the Emil Bogan Research Prize for Outstanding Research. After she earned her PhD, she conducted research for a decade before and after going to medical school. She also practiced as an ophthalmologist for 10 years, but she eventually returned full time to her true passion: research.



Recognized with numerous awards from the National Institutes of Health and private foundations for her contributions to age-related macular degeneration (AMD), keratoconus and other eye diseases, Cris also received the University of Arizona Foundation Award for Meritorious Performance in Teaching, the Solomon Scholar Award for Medical Research from Cedars-Sinai Medical Center and UCLA, the Paul Rubenstein Award for Research at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, the Everett Kinsey Lectureship, and the Whitney Sampson Lectureship. Serving as

Supporting vision-saving research at the University of California, Irvine's Gavin Herbert Eye Institute since 2002.

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The information published in the DEF newsletter is intended to help you better understand various eye diseases and available treatment options. DEF does not sell or endorse products, treatments or procedures. Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information presented. It is not intended to be a substitute for the advice and recommendations of your professional eye-care providers.

Almon Targets Mitochondrial Rejuvenation to Treat Dry AMD

Mitochondrial damage is a key component of many serious diseases, including age-related macular degeneration (AMD), diabetic retinopathy, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, cancer and glaucoma.

DEF-supported researchers have been collaborating on a drug known as PU-91, also called fenofibrate, which rejuvenates failing and sick mitochondria to restore normal energy production. Fenofibrate is an oral drug that already has been approved by the FDA for other purposes.

Thanks to the research of Dr. M. Cristina Kenney and Dr. Howard Federoff, former vice chancellor of health affairs at UC Irvine, it has also been shown to target the master regulator of mitochondrial energy production in cells and reverse mitochondrial failure.

Federoff and Kenney founded a company called Almon Therapeutics to continue the work of repurposing fenofibrate for the treatment of dry AMD, which comprises 85% of all AMD cases and, to date, has no effective oral treatment.

Almon is dedicated to bringing Kenney's scientific discoveries, including a new treatment for AMD, to patients. To do this, they are establishing the Cristina Kenney Memorial Laboratory, which will complete vital preclinical studies to move her work forward.

"Cris' research was truly groundbreaking," Federoff says. "She worked tirelessly for much of her life to find a therapy for dry AMD. Almon is where her work and legacy will live on, and we will continue toward her goal of providing a treatment for macular degeneration and other age-related diseases."

To support Almon Therapeutic's effort to bring a treatment for dry AMD to patients, please contact Dr. Anthony Nesburn directly at (310) 623-4466.

Words to Live By

Dr. Roni Leiderman joins DEF as advisor to the president and interim director of development

“Dedication. Compassion. Advocacy.” These are the guiding principles of the Discovery Eye Foundation, as described by Roni Cohen Leiderman, PhD, DEF’s new interim director of development and advisor to the president.

A dean emeritus at Nova Southeastern University, Leiderman has dedicated her career to supporting families, students and communities through her involvement with various universities. Her personal journey with vision issues, particularly her son’s challenge with keratoconus, ignited her passion to focus on sight-saving efforts.



“It was through the National Keratoconus Foundation — then one of DEF’s programs — that I accessed the services and information my son needed to make informed decisions,” she says.

Leiderman’s path intersected with DEF Medical Director Dr. Anthony Nesburn, whose pioneering work in the field left a profound impression on her.

“Dr. Anthony Nesburn and Dr. Cris Kenney excelled in their research and patient advocacy, and they were clearly the professionals worthy of my time, effort and fundraising for their initiatives,” she says. She eagerly joined forces with DEF, furthering her resolve to make a difference for those struggling with sight issues.

During her tenure as dean of the Mailman Segal Center for Human Development at Nova Southeastern University, Leiderman started Friends of Vision, a fundraising

initiative for the National Keratoconus Foundation, illuminating the importance of vision preservation.

“As my son and our family greatly profited from their generous support, it was an easy decision for me to become involved with DEF,” she says. Leiderman joined the board of directors in 2005.

As DEF’s interim director of development and advisor to the president, she is focused on the organization’s Vision Legacy Society and annual giving programs, as well as assisting with the recruitment of a permanent director of development.

Driven by DEF’s core values of dedication, compassion and advocacy, Leiderman aims to highlight impactful work for donors: “The Discovery Eye Foundation’s sight-saving mission will continue to heal and save vision for countless people in perpetuity. It is an honor to take on my new roles, with clarity and gratitude that DEF’s core values align with what truly matters.”



VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Your ongoing support of DEF fills us with gratitude. Today, we are honored to introduce our Vision Legacy Society, dedicated to preserving and advancing our mission to safeguard vision through groundbreaking research, patient education and transformative treatments. By participating in our estate-planning initiative, your generous contribution will leave a lasting legacy in your name, ensuring the preservation of eyesight for you and your family and for future generations.

For more information, visit discoveryeye.mylegacygift.org.

M. Cristina Kenney

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a member of the National Institutes of Health Visual Science A Study Section for many years, she held the position of chair from 1998 to 2000.

Perhaps most notable among Cris' ground-breaking work is the research she conducted as research director of DEF. In the past 10 years, she exponentially advanced scientific knowledge of mitochondria, earning a reputation as one of the world's foremost experts on the subject. She

was exploring drugs and substances to enhance mitochondrial health and, ultimately, improve retinal cell health in AMD and other aging diseases. Cris most recently co-founded Almon Therapeutics (see inside) to develop mitochondria-targeting drugs

for various age-related conditions, including AMD, Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy. Her work will continue to have an impact on the field of mitochondrial health for years to come.

Dedicated mentor and colleague

Every student, every resident, every fellow with whom Cris came into contact could not help but be amazed by the time and individual attention she gave to them. Mention her name to any of them, and words such as *brilliant, kind, warm, engaged, life-changing* come flowing from their mouths. From asking probing questions while looking at their conference posters, to uncovering creative ways to ensure they had enough resources to conduct their own research,



to mentoring countless protégés in her lab at the Gavin Herbert Eye Institute at University of California, Irvine (UCI), Cris always had time to devote to nurturing the next generation of researchers. She was also a sought-after collaborator among her colleagues at UCI and at institutions around the world.

Beloved friend and family member

Born in Santa Fe, where she is buried, Cris loved working on her family homestead there alongside her devoted husband of 35 years, DEF Medical Director Dr. Anthony Nesburn. The couple worked and played together, traveling extensively on adventure trips to Antarctica, Panama and Costa Rica; scuba diving the Great Barrier Reef; safaris in Africa; and touring India. They

enjoyed skiing in Colorado, as well as snorkeling in the Coral Sea, Belize, Bora Bora, Hawaii and the Caribbean. Perhaps Cris' favorite trips were to international Kenney family reunions in Trieste and Santa Fe. She collected small elephant statues from around the world and always came home with a hat or cap or T-shirt from every destination.

Cris' contributions to science are virtually immeasurable, and they will live on. Her passion and caring for those around her, too, will live on. She will be deeply missed by her family, friends, colleagues, patients and students.

To make a donation to DEF in memory of Dr. M. Cristina Kenney, please visit www.discoveryeye.org/you-can-help/donate/.