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EDITORS NOTE

Greetings to all our readers with good wishes for a superb 2026.

To our Ophthalmology readers please visit our booth at the OSSA Congress in Cape Town in April.

2026 is already shaping up to be one of the most dynamic years in the retinal world. Momentum is building, long-awaited breakthroughs are emerging, and the patient voice is finally being recognised everywhere it matters. Retina South Africa is proud to be a major role player in this transformation.

Here's what's new, exciting, and full of promise:

- New treatments are imminent
- A novel treatment pathway has been launched
- A new perspective for trial registrars is emerging
- A stronger inclusion of the patient voice in every facet of patient care
- Fresh awareness of holistic health and its vital connection to retinal wellbeing
- New young leaders joining Retina South Africa
- Growing focus on para sport as a pathway to empowerment
- A brand-new Retina SA website about to launch

We hope these winds of change inspire every member of our community.

Let's make 2026 a year of commitment, collaboration, and renewed hope for protecting and restoring vision.

Claudette Medefindt
Editor

DIS-CHEM RIDE FOR SIGHT

A huge thank you to Dis-Chem Pharmacies our headline sponsor of the 37th edition of our flagship fundraiser, held on 15 February - a record-breaking and truly unforgettable event.

This year's Ride for Sight welcomed almost 4 000 cyclists, the largest field since the Covid lockdown. We are truly grateful to Dis-Chem for their steadfast support since 2008 - helping us advance our mission of Cycling to Restore the Gift of Sight.

Race Director Linsay Engelbrecht and Team Retina worked tirelessly to deliver a superb event. The Dis-Chem Foundation generously matched participant donations for the competition draw. The two tempting prizes of an Orbea Road Bike sponsored by CycleLab; and a tree-top getaway from Pezulu Lodge resulted in record support from the cyclists. All these donations support genetic testing for children from financially disadvantaged families.

Linsay's passion for cycling, para sports, and especially para tandems for blind and low-vision riders, continues to drive remarkable growth. This year, an impressive 60 para cyclists participated, helping make cycling accessible to people with vision loss across South Africa.

Our heartfelt thanks go to all partners, sponsors, volunteers, and staff for ensuring the 37th Dis-Chem Ride for Sight maintained it's standing as one of the best quality events on the cycling calendar.

NEW MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE (MC) MEMBERS AT RETINA SA

Two new young members have been co-opted onto our MC - Ferdie Danzfuss and Pieter Lindeque.

Ferdie Danzfuss heads our IT Steering Committee and is the developer of the groundbreaking Umsizi Reader App, which translates text to voice in all South African languages. **Umzisi App**

Pieter Lindeque, an educator, is the new head of our Youth Council.

WEBSITE RELAUNCH

Our completely redesigned website - created by award-winning Brand and Digital Design Agency Simplr - is launching soon!

This exciting revamp, sponsored by the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, includes new accessibility features and a fresh library

of text and video content covering all aspects of retinal conditions, genetics, accessibility tips, lifestyle and educational guides, trusted sources of research updates, messages from the Retina SA team, and much more.

Thank you Simplr for your significant discount, showing your commitment to fighting retinal vision loss.

Chan Zuckerberg Initiative

Simplr

LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE

Retina South Africa will be active nationally and globally in 2026:

- Sending two delegates to the World Congress in Texas in June, held alongside the USA Fighting Blindness Visions

Congress
- Attending the Ophthalmology Congress in Cape Town in April
- Attending the South African Optometric Congress in Durban in August
- Attending the Diabetic Alliance Congress in November
- Hosting regional members' meetings in both centres

To stay informed about events, please contact Head Office to join our mailing list.

INCREASING OUR FOOTPRINT

Our fundraising committee, ably led by Mariza Jurgens, continues to ensure that our income keeps pace with our expanding work in patient support, advocacy, education, awareness, and treatment readiness.

We also acknowledge the outstanding support of the Ophthalmology and Optometry professional societies, which contributes significantly to the high regard in which Retina South Africa is held. Under the leadership of CEO Manny Moodley, our

advocacy efforts are making strong strides. Our Management Committee, led by Sonya Lee Mahabeer, remains a cornerstone of our success.

Retina South Africa is committed to improving the patient journey by partnering with appropriate role players to ensure all South Africans with retinal vision loss have access to available treatments, rehabilitation, support, advice and referral to service providers. With new age treatments imminent we have a window of opportunity to ensure patients are ready to access the new treatments when they become available. We need your support.

We thank all our donors and partners for their support and assure them that every Rand raised is wisely spent with patient needs front and centre of our entire organisation.

NEW AT UCT - HEAD OF HUMAN GENETICS

Professor Collet Dandara has succeeded Prof Raj Ramesar as Head of the Division of Human Genetics at the University of Cape Town.

Prof Dandara is a leading African expert in pharmacogenomics, studying how genetic differences affect treatment responses - especially in condution such as HIV, hypertension and cancer.

With over 180 publications, he is internationally recognised and is the 2025 recipient of the prestigious HUGO Africa Prize.

He remains a strong supporter of Retina South Africa and our collaborative work.

CHARLES BONNET SYNDROME (CBS)

CBS may occur in people with many forms of significant vision loss, causing visual hallucinations ranging from patterns or shapes to people, animals, landscapes, or flashes of light.
People with CBS usually know the images aren’t real but need to know that CBS is not a mental health disorder. It is a normal response of the visual brain when sensory input decreases.

Awareness reduces fear and stigma.

Simple strategies such as improved lighting, blinking, shifting gaze and mindful breathing can help reduce episodes. CBS often disappears after a few weeks but may recur.

If you experience CBS, speak with an eye-care professional. Our social workers are here to support you, contact us.

RARE DISEASE DAY - 28TH FEBRUARY 2026

To mark Rare Diseases Day Retina International, ERN-EYE, Foundation Fighting Blindness, and the Ocular Diseases Forum launched Act4RED - a global initiative to transform diagnosis, care, and research for rare eye diseases. .

The theme was STOP THE LOSS OF VISION by driving coordinated policy action, accelerating research, and ensuring patient needs sit at the heart of care.

Editor’s note: Although the goal of restoring vision remains an ultimate objective, many promising treatments that stop or slow vision loss never reach the market due to not achieving stringent outcomes. A new approach to patient reported outcome measures and patient needs must receive more attention.

LISTEN TO THE ACT4RED PODCAST

TAKE CONTROL

- See your Eye care professional regularly. Secondary problems such as cataracts, elevated ocular pressure or macular oedema can accelerate vision loss and are treatable
- If treatments exist for your condition, follow your doctor’s instructions
- Discuss antioxidant options with your eye-care specialist

- Get a genetic test for inherited retinal conditions, especially for young patients. Register on MyRetinaTracker.org (preferably with genetic results)
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle - healthy food choices, exercise, sleep, no smoking, UV/blue-light protection
- Get connected. Access free training and accessibility tools for smartphones and computers
- Maintain family, group and community interaction.

Join the Fight: Save Our Sight – Because Every Rand Counts

RETINA
SOUTH AFRICA

a Cure in Sight for Blindness

Imagine waking up to a world that's slowly fading; blurry edges, dimming colours, the fear that tomorrow might steal more sight. For thousands of South Africans living with interited retinal conditions, Age Related Macular Degeneration or Diabetic Retinopathy, that's no imagination. It's daily life.

But here's the good news: Retina South Africa is turning that fear into hope. Through our Save Our Sight campaign, we're funding life-changing research, providing guidance, and pushing for better access to treatments, so no one has to face blindness alone.

And you can help. Right now.

If you're not already a member, just donate R250 to the Save Our Sight project (retinasa.org.za/shop/Save-Our-Sight-Campaign-p672596596). That single contribution gets you in; plus an automatic entry into their monthly draw where one lucky supporter wins R500.

Already part of the Retina SA family? Renew your annual membership for R240 and you're entered every month too; no extra cost (retinasa.org.za/shop/Membership-Fee-p672596678).

Every rand raised goes straight to work: supporting people with visual impairment, backing cutting-edge retinal research, and helping families navigate sight loss. It's not charity; it's investment in a future where "blindness" isn't the final word.
Your small step could brighten someone's whole world.

Because sight isn't just a gift—it's worth saving.

Congrulations to our January winner John Stephens

RESEARCH NEWS

By Claudette Medefindt

PLEASE NOTE- Retina South Africa does not endorse any treatments or supplements discussed in this E-News. Please consult your eye care professional.

NEW TREATMENTS AND CLINICAL TRIALS

1. PROTEOMICS - EXCITING NEW APPROACH FOR RHO-RELATED RP

Octant Bio has launched a Phase 1/2 trial testing OCT-980, a small-molecule oral therapy for Rhodopsin-related Dominant Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP).

Instead of correcting the faulty gene, this molecule aims to replace the misfolded Rhodopsin protein - potentially improving peripheral and low-light vision through a convenient, Non-invasive treatment option.

More information:
https://clinicaltrials.gov/study/NCT07408232

Editor's note: This treatment applies only to RP patients with an RHO-mutation.

Contact Retina South Africa for advice on genetic testing.

2. SPLICE BIO – DUAL VECTOR GENE THERAPY FOR STARGARDT DISEASE

Because the ABCA4 gene is too large for a traditional viral vector, Splice Bio developed a novel dual-vector approach. The ABCA4 gene is split and introduced into two copies of an engineered Adeno associated virus. They are introduced into the retina simultaneously. Inside the retina, the two parts of the protein re-combine to produce a full-length functional protein.
The ASTRA trial is currently assessing dosage and efficacy.

Listen to the FFB podcast:
https://youtu.be/3UFu-InO5wQ?si=kjSpBH03CDJesnJZ

3. USHER SYNDROME – GENE THERAPY TRIAL

AAVantgarde Bio has completed enrolment for its Phase 1/2 gene therapy trial for Usher Syndrome Type 1B (MYO7A gene). Usher Type 1 causes profound hearing loss coupled with RP. The progress towards treatment for this doubly disabling condition is truly welcomed.

If you have Usher Syndrome and need to have genetic testing contact Retina South Africa for more information.

Fighting Blindness podcast:

https://youtu.be/rZks7ZhwaeM?si=BLgD3NyUXghOicU5

4. BEST'S DISEASE - PROMISING EARLY RESULTS

Opus Genetics has reported encouraging outcomes from their Best1 gene therapy trial.

The first treated patient showed:

- A 3-line improvement in visual acuity at 3 months,
- Reduced sub-retinal fluid and retinal thickness,

- No adverse events.

The OPGX Best 1 Gene therapy delivers a working copy of the Best1 gene to the Retinal Pigment Epithelial [RPE] layer of cells where the normal gene is usually present, restoring the production of the normal copy of the Best1 protein. This treatment is being developed for Best Vitelliform Macular Disease and other rare Best1-associated conditions. More results are expected by mid-year.

5. GENE-AGNOSTIC THERAPY FOR RP

Sparing Vision has completed dosing in its Phase I/II PRODYGY trial for SPVN06, a therapy designed for RP patients of any genetic subtype.

SPVN06 delivers two factors - RdCVF and RdCVFL - which work together to protect cone cells and reduce oxidative stress.
A total of 33 patients were enrolled, including 6 controls and initial results are expected in 2027.

This approach could also help other Inherited Retinal Diseases [IRD's] and Dry Age-Related Macular Degeneration [AMD].

Podcast:
https://youtu.be/j090G0l14rM?si=BV9jVmg6k1jaHKbT

More info: **https://sparingvision.com/sparingvision-successfully-completes-prodygy-trial-patient-dosing-with-spvn06-its-novel-neuroprotective-gene-therapy/**

6. GENE THERAPY- THE FUTURE

Dr Jannis Paulus of the Wilmer Eye Institute (Johns Hopkins) shared the latest advances in stem cell research with Michelle Glazer from Foundation Fighting Blindness [USA]. He discussed the use of Optical Coherence Tomography [OCT] imaging and gold nanoparticles to track individual cells as they repair retinal damage. These innovations may dramatically improve delivery, dosing, and outcome measurement for future therapies.

READ MORE

GET INVOLVED

Membership: R240 per year (R500 monthly SOS prize draw).

Supporters join SOS with R250 annual donation via the website store.

Support our events and fundraising projects - volunteers welcome

Join our WhatsApp groups for peer support
Listen to our podcasts: Retinal Realities and Back to Basics
Download Woolworths App - select My Difference and select Retina SA as your beneficiary
Join our para-athletes team or champion your favourite sport

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Editor's Note: Flashing lights may indicate the possibility of a retinal tear, please consult an eye care professional immediately.

Retina South Africa Disclaimer

Information disseminated by Retina South Africa is for information purposes only. Readers must discuss any intervention with their Eye Care Practitioner. Information in this E-News does not imply that Retina South Africa endorses any particular therapy, intervention or medication. Retina South Africa assumes no responsibility for the use made of any information provided in this newsletter.

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