



**PRESS RELEASE - For Immediate Release**

**FROM: Retina South Africa**

**Date: 20 May 2026**

**HOPE IS ON THE HORIZON – Retina South Africa**

**Clinical Trials Bring New Hope for Genetic Eye Conditions on International Clinical Trials Day**

**Johannesburg, South Africa**

**Today, 20 May 2026, Retina South Africa joins the global health community in observing International Clinical Trials Day, highlighting the vital role clinical research plays in the development of new medical treatments and the quest to bring sight to the blind.**

**Clinical Trials Day commemorates 20 May 1747, when the world's first recorded controlled medical intervention was carried out. Nearly three centuries later, clinical trials remain the foundation of medical progress.**

**Why clinical trials are bringing sight to the blind**

**For people living with genetic retinal conditions, including retinitis pigmentosa, Stargardt disease and Usher syndrome, the impact of clinical trials now offers hope for a sighted future.**

**Progress in gene and cell based therapy**

**These conditions cause progressive vision loss and lead to partial or total blindness. Until recently, there were no treatments available, but that reality is now changing.**

**Because of the advances in genetics and biological research, scientists have developed:**

**Gene therapies that replace faulty genes causing vision loss**

**RNA-based treatments that can edit and repair mutations**

**Drugs to slow disease progression**

**Innovative approaches to repurpose molecules in the retina and bypass dying photoreceptors.**

**Several treatments have already been approved internationally, and many more are in late-stage clinical trials, meaning treatment options are no longer a distant dream - they are becoming a reality.**

**Clinical trials: safe, ethical and essential**

**Clinical trials are carefully regulated research studies designed to:**

**Test safety before treatments reach the public**

**Prove that treatments really work**

**Protect participants through strict ethical oversight**

**Participation is always voluntary, and every trial follows internationally accepted safety and ethics standards.**

**“Clinical trials are the bridge between scientific discovery and real-world treatment,” says Claudette Medefindt, Head of Science at Retina South Africa.**

**“Without clinical trials, today’s breakthroughs in genetic eye disease would simply not exist. Retina South Africa needs support to ensure that innovative treatments are accessible to all South Africans who are going blind due to genetic retinal conditions.”**

**Retina South Africa has already participated in one global trial to slow vision loss in Stargardt Disease -a condition that affects one in 10 000 South African children.**

**“With more support from funders and those affected we could bring more trials and imminent treatments to South Africa” Medefindt added.**

**Over 300 gene mutations have been linked to genetic vision loss and most trials and treatments are gene specific. One of the major barriers is that a genetic diagnosis of the specific gene is not available in State hospitals or reimbursed by medical aids.**

**Invest in a Miracle**

**The future of treatment for genetic retinal conditions is no longer hypothetical - it is actively unfolding through clinical trials today.**

**“We have young children who could have vision loss stopped right now with enough support.” Medefindt concluded.**

**For more information for patients or funders contact Retina South Africa via their website [www.retinasa.org.za](http://www.retinasa.org.za)**

**Media enquiries:**

**Claudette Medefindt**

**Head of Science, Retina South Africa**

**Claudette has Retinitis Pigmentosa and has lost 90% of her vision.**

**Email: [claudette@retinasa.org.za](mailto:claudette@retinasa.org.za)**

**Mobile: 0833065262**

**Deputy Chair of Retina SA -Mariza Jurgens [Afrikaans interviews] Mariza has Cone rod Disease and has only light perception. Mariza sits on various National and International boards dealing with Disability and Accessibility including a WHO committee for accessibility.**

**E: [mariza@retinasa.org.za](mailto:mariza@retinasa.org.za)**

**WA only: +2766581394**

**Vernacular or English interviews : Lindiwe Maredi -[lindiwe@retinasa.org.za](mailto:lindiwe@retinasa.org.za) or**

**Victoria Musimo – [victoria@retinasa.org.za](mailto:victoria@retinasa.org.za)**

**Senior Social Workers at Retina South Africa. Office tel: 0114501181**

**Website: [www.retinasa.org.za](http://www.retinasa.org.za)**