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SIXTH ANNUAL INVESTIGATOR AWARDS RECIPIENTS ANNOUNCED BY PREVENT BLINDNESS AMERICA

National Non-profit Group Provides Grants to Three Sight-Saving Research Initiatives

CHICAGO (May 27, 2009) – Prevent Blindness America, the nation’s oldest volunteer eye health and safety organization, announced today the recipients of its 2009 Investigator Awards. The awards were presented to Children’s Hospital Boston, Case Western Reserve University and Washington University in St. Louis.

The Investigator Awards are grants awarded to research studies that are dedicated to preventing avoidable vision loss. The recipients were chosen by a panel of scientists in coordination with the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO). Over the years, Prevent Blindness America and its affiliates have awarded more than \$500,000 to projects through its Investigator Award program.

“We understand the crucial impact that vision research has on saving sight and have made it part of our mission to fund projects that help to protect our eyes and maintain healthy vision,” said Hugh R. Parry, president and CEO of Prevent Blindness America.

Investigator Award recipients for 2009 include Peter K. Kriz, M.D., of Children’s Hospital Boston, for his project entitled “Effectiveness of Protective Eyewear in Reducing Severe Eye Injuries in High School Field Hockey Players.” Today, 72 percent of sports-related eye injuries occur in those who are less than 25 years of age. Field hockey is the second most played team sport with some elite players capable of achieving ball speeds of close to 100 mph. The purpose of the study is to determine whether mandated protective eyewear effectively reduces the incidence of severe eye injuries within a select population of female hockey players. Prevent Blindness America currently recommends that field hockey players wear sports goggles with polycarbonate lenses on the field and goalies wear a full-face mask.

Loretta B. Szczotka-Flynn, O.D., M.S. and co-investigator Mahmoud Ghannoum, Ph.D., from Case Western Reserve University were awarded a 2009 Investigator Award for their research project entitled, “Prevention of Soft Contact Lens Associated Fusarium Biofilms.” Biofilms formed by microbes can be found on contact lens cases and contact lenses during infection of Fusarium keratitis. The study will utilize a model of soft contact lens biofilms to assess the efficacy of contact lens solutions against them and test mechanisms of their prevention.

Lastly, Steven M. Kymes, Ph.D., M.H.A., from Washington University in St. Louis, has received the 2009 Investigator Award for his project "Development of a Model for Estimation of Longitudinal Changes in Mean Deviation in Patients with Primary Open Angle Glaucoma." In the United States, there are currently close to 2.3 million Americans with the potentially blinding eye disease, which currently has no cure. This project will pool data from existing landmark glaucoma studies in an effort to construct a validated method of predicting the progression of glaucoma. The end result of the study seeks to improve strategies for delivery of glaucoma related services, provide a basis to document the burden of glaucoma in the community and to improve methods to evaluate interventions to prevent or delay the onset of glaucoma.

"These three projects will hopefully help us get one step closer to our core mission to prevent blindness and preserve sight," added Parry. "We look forward to the exciting results of these highly innovative and important vision-saving studies!"

Prevent Blindness America has also declared June as Vision Research Awareness Month in an effort to educate the public on the critical role that ongoing research studies play in saving sight. In fact, the 101-year-old organization was founded to help prevent blindness in infants, known as "Babies' Sore Eyes." Doctors discovered that simple eye drops administered shortly after birth could prevent the devastating infection and the group was formed to expand the practice across the country. Today, all babies born in United States hospitals receive these eye drops.

For more information on the Prevent Blindness America Investigator Awards, or for free brochures on eye diseases and other eye conditions, call toll-free at (800) 331-2020 or visit preventblindness.org.

About Prevent Blindness America

Founded in 1908, Prevent Blindness America is the nation's leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight. Focused on promoting a continuum of vision care, Prevent Blindness America touches the lives of millions of people each year through public and professional education, advocacy, certified vision screening and training, community and patient service programs and research. These services are made possible through the generous support of the American public. Together with a network of affiliates, divisions and chapters, it's committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America. For more information, or to make a contribution to the sight-saving fund, call (800) 331-2020 or visit us on the Web at preventblindness.org.

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