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PREVENT BLINDNESS AMERICA ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF SECOND ANNUAL INVESTIGATOR AWARDS

National Non-profit Organization Urges Ongoing Vision Research for the Future Eye Care of Americans

CHICAGO (May 31, 2005) – Prevent Blindness America, the nation’s primary vision eye health organization focused on vision loss prevention, announced today the recipients of the 2005 Investigator Awards. After receiving many worthy applications, the grants were given to three institutions: Duke University, the University of Miami and the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

PBA established its annual Investigator Award program to provide research grants to help address the growing numbers of Americans at risk for blindness. The winners were selected by a team of scientists who are members of the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO) from a field of nearly 50 proposals.

Vision loss cases in the United States are reaching their highest total ever. Due to factors such as increased longevity, the rise in the number diabetes patients and the lack of access to affordable health care, the numbers of those losing their sight is becoming staggering. In fact, more than 80 million people are at risk today of losing their sight.

“Half of all blindness cases are preventable and we’ve dedicated ourselves to making sure that number declines,” said Daniel D. Garrett, senior vice president of PBA. “One of the ways we can save sight is through research and we’ve developed a program that helps institutions achieve that goal.”

Glaucoma is a serious eye disease that affects more than 2 million Americans. Joshua D. Stein, MD, at the Duke University Department of Ophthalmology has received the PBA Investigator Award for his research project entitled “Variation in the Rates of Utilization of Services for Patients with Glaucoma.” The study seeks to determine the extent that both demographic and geographic variables have on the treatment of glaucoma patients.

Stephen G. Schwartz, MD, at the University of Miami, Miller School of Medicine and the Bascom Eye Institute has also received an Investigator Award for his work on the study of corticosteroids. The medications, which are injected into the eye to treat a variety of

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eye diseases, have caused some patients to develop glaucoma. The research program hopes to discover the reasons why it affects some patients and not others.

Maintaining a healthy diet can ward off many illnesses. Suzen M. Moeller, PhD, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and the final Investigator Award winner, will study whether healthy diets can increase the plant pigments, lutein and zeaxanthin in the retina. The project, entitled "Impact of Long-Term High Fruit and Vegetable Diet on Retinal Carotenoids" will evaluate the impact of healthy diets on eye health.

"Because of our commitment to research in the subject of eye disease, we are able to demonstrate to the public, medical professionals and government agencies the seriousness of vision loss is in this country today," said Daniel D. Garrett, senior vice president of PBA.

For more information on the PBA Investigator Award, or for free brochures on vision research and eye diseases, call PBA toll-free at 1-800-331-2020 or visit www.preventblindness.org. PBA offers free brochures and/or fact sheets on age-related eye diseases, as well as on conditions affecting children and young adults.

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, 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 1-800-331-2020 or visit us on the Web at www.preventblindness.org.

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