
For Immediate Release

Tuesday, October 13, 2009

Contact:

National Eye Institute
(301) 496-5248
neinews@nei.nih.gov

Book Recounts Establishment and First Three Decades of the National Eye Institute

Former director and deputy director tell the NEI's story

Carl Kupfer, M.D., and Edward McManus have been a team since 1973—Kupfer's third year as the first director of the National Eye Institute (NEI), part of the National Institutes of Health, and McManus's first year as NEI executive officer.

"From the beginning, Carl had the vision, and I was the implementer," remembers McManus, who later served as NEI deputy director.

So it was fitting that they reunited in 2004, four years after they had both retired from the NEI, to document the Institute's history.

"Carl was the driving force behind the book, just like his philosophy was the driving force behind the first several decades of the NEI," McManus says.

Kupfer and McManus contacted historian and editor Nancy Berlage for guidance in beginning the project. Berlage was tasked with merging two visions of the book—Kupfer's desire for a narrative, documenting the NEI's philosophy and accomplishments, and McManus's goal of a scholarly public policy paper, describing the development of a successful organization.

"As a historian, I often work from documents, which can only tell a limited story," Berlage says. "It was very exciting for me to be able to talk to these individuals who had the Institute's collective memory in their heads."

Living histories, however, present the challenge of objectivity, so the team searched for secondary sources to confirm these recollections. Gale Saunders, Kupfer's former assistant, gathered much of this information from boxes in the National Archives that contained dusty papers: minutes from National Advisory Eye Council meetings, Congressional testimony, letters

describing strategies for the Institute's formation, and program planning documents from after the NEI's establishment.

Kupfer and McManus also collected oral histories from people who had testified to Congress in support of an eye institute in the 1960s. "It was wonderful to be able to get insights from those who had been originally involved," Kupfer says. "Through the interviews, we had a pretty good picture of what happened, and we were also able to tell a more interesting story."

Kupfer remembers that the most satisfying part of the project was watching these interviews and facts emerge into a story. "It was like a giant quilt stitched together carefully over time," he says.

The team began writing nearly two years ago, and organized the book's chapters by themes including, "The Intramural Research Program," "Randomized Clinical Trials," and "National Eye Health Education Program." The publication was recently released to coincide with the NEI's 40th anniversary.

Members of the scientific community may read it to gain insights on how a new organization was built. "Perhaps people can learn from the positive actions we took and our errors of omission," McManus says. "They can see the problems, and how one group tackled them."

Berlage notes that the book could be particularly interesting to the recipients of vision science advances. "The general public can read this to see how science works, how it is organized, and how medical procedures develop," she says. "Most, if not all, of us will be on the receiving end of that at some point."

But for the vision research community, this publication holds a more personal significance, according to Kupfer. "It documents many of the accomplishments of vision researchers, which helped pay back the investment that the U.S. public made when it created the NEI."

Read more about the NEI's history and view a copy of *History of the National Eye Institute 1968-2000*, By Carl Kupfer and Edward McManus with Nancy Berlage at www.nei.nih.gov/neihistory.

###

The National Eye Institute, part of the National Institutes of Health, leads the federal government's research on the visual system and eye diseases. NEI supports basic and clinical science programs that result in the development of sight-saving treatments. For more information, visit www.nei.nih.gov.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) — The Nation's Medical Research Agency — includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is the primary federal agency for conducting and supporting basic, clinical, and translational medical research, and it investigates the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit www.nih.gov.

