



A Call to Action: Launching the *International Journal of Eye Banking*

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In early 2010, I attended a three-day meeting at the World Health Organization (WHO) on cell and tissue donation¹ at the request of the Eye Bank Association of America. For the first time, after 15 years in eye banking, I heard of resources²⁻⁶ and projects happening around the world⁷⁻¹⁰ that would impact eye banking as we know it. I was in awe of the number of experts convened (Fig. 1) to globally harmonize the safety and regulation of donated human cells and tissues for transplantation. Participants engaged in thoughtful, robust discussion during presentations and the dinner that followed. Challenges unique to specific regions of the world were heard. Back home in the United States, I updated colleagues on these activities and asked how the average eye banker like me would hear of this information. How could we help these global efforts be successful and meet the needs of eye donation and corneal transplantation in our region? Had we shared our recent unique projects, like the Cornea Collaborative,¹¹ with eye bankers beyond the United States? Answers were not forthcoming.

I considered this in light of the significant changes in eye banking in the United States over the same time. For example, increased scope and number of regulations and standards,

increased inspections by official agencies, significant advances in corneal transplant surgical techniques, outsourcing eye bank functions to other entities, offering new services, and rapid cycles of innovation for well established eye banks. (See the related article in this issue, “Eye Banking in the 21st Century: How Far Have We Come? Are We Prepared for What’s Ahead?”)

In late 2010, a colleague emailed, “Too bad we [eye bankers] don’t have pertinent publications like this,” referring to a journal article on reimbursement in another healthcare field. It was true. No one source was available to publish serious, peer-reviewed research on eye banking. At that moment, it struck me as obvious and compelling that the eye bank profession not only deserves, but requires, an eye bank-focused, one-stop, readily accessible (free and open-access) location for information. A place where serious research is published, searchable (indexed), and stored, and other eye bank practice-related material and resources are readily available to everyone interested in eye banking around the world, with global experiences and perspectives represented and welcome.

And so the idea for the *International Journal of Eye Banking* was born.



Fig. 1. Global leaders met to discuss the implementation of regulatory oversight of human cells and tissues for transplantation,¹ Geneva, Switzerland, February 10-12, 2010.

The time has come

Is the timing right to start this journal? Is eye banking ready? Historically, eye bank associations and their members have paved the way forward to the next advancement for donation and transplantation. (See related article in this issue, “The Evolution in Eye Banking in the United States: Landmarks in the History of the Eye Bank Association of America.”) However, in the area of performing and publishing scientific eye bank research, we are well behind our cell, organ, and tissue donation partners.

I asked editors of leading ophthalmology journals, who reported receiving and declining submissions on eye banking that were outside their scope. Dr. Doyle Stulting, former editor of *Cornea* and a member of our Editorial Advisory Board, agreed that there could be a “niche and a need” for an eye bank journal.

Without a common repository for information, eye banks are limited in their ability to share research, best practices, and advances in eye donation and eye banking. And although eye banks were established in the 1940s, the term eye banks wasn’t introduced into the MeSH (Medical Subject Heading) indexing for the MEDLINE database until 1991, as discovered by our University of Minnesota biomedical librarian. Articles related to the term were indexed only back to 1975. All articles published earlier do not have the subject term associated with it, limiting search capabilities for an integral portion of the community’s history. (In contrast, “corneal transplantation” as a subject heading wasn’t introduced until 1990 but it has been indexed back to the beginning of MEDLINE.) Since 1975, a mere 200 English-language articles featuring eye banks as a major focus have been published. It may be that this journal is overdue.

At subsequent international conferences, I received overwhelmingly positive responses from leaders and members in the eye bank and corneal transplant communities to launch the *International Journal of Eye Banking*. The Editorial Advisory Board formed organically with distinguished leaders in ophthalmology and eye banking volunteering to serve. We held the first formal meeting on October 23, 2011, during the American Academy of Ophthalmology Meeting in Orlando, Florida, with 8 members present. In fall 2011, we approved editorial policies and issued the first call for papers.

Concurrently and independently of the journal, Dr. Graeme Pollock from Australia called for an exploratory meeting to discuss forming an alliance of eye bank associations and invited the journal to attend. The Global Alliance of Eye Bank Associations (GAEA), now in development, aims to “establish a cooperative alliance of the world’s leading eye bank associations.”¹² The journal intends to foster and be part of these efforts with GAEA and eye bank associations around the world.

The eye bank community appears ready to use a journal to advance our practice and profession.

Realities and opportunities

While globalization is not new to eye banking, I suggest the eye bank profession as a whole is not yet fully aware of what it means or how to leverage the forces to advance our mission to help restore sight through eye donation. We must be able to quickly respond in this era of ongoing swift and sweeping changes. Consider the globalization forces described in Thomas L. Friedman’s book, *The World is Flat*, as applied to eye banking. For example, corneal tissue offers made by eye banks and accepted by surgeons solely online (referred to by Friedman as “workflow software”), contracting parts of the eye banking process to other entities (outsourcing), eye banks providing new services (e.g., tissue preparation) to other entities or individuals (insourcing), and new forms of communication and technology in mass production and use (in-forming and “the steroids”) are all here. To thrive in this era of globalization, eye banks will need to understand these forces and become better prepared.

Eye banking will face new tests as countries around the world work through economic crises, healthcare reform, and differing standards and regulations that currently result in decreased tissue sharing among many countries. And while it is unknown whether new regulations in the United States for tissue or organ donation and in the pharma industry will be positive or negative, we all know they *will* affect eye banking.

The need for corneal tissue for transplantation is expected to remain steady or increase in the foreseeable future.¹³⁻¹⁵ The volume is impressive. Annually, more than 100,000 corneas are provided for transplantation by just the 149 eye banks in Europe and the United States alone.¹³⁻¹⁴ More eye banks are being formed and developed around the world but the number is unknown because there is no one directory or regulatory oversight of eye banks. This journal aims to remedy this and to “flatten” the world of eye banking by creating an environment that will cultivate:

- Publishing of important, timely eye bank research and practice related material,
- Resource sharing, open and accessible to all eye bankers,
- Learning,
- Robust dialogue,
- New interest in our work and provide our donation partners and regulatory authorities a place to find vetted information on eye donation and eye banking,
- Faster cycles of innovation, and
- Wider distribution and adoption of advances and best practices related to corneal transplantation and ocular research.

A bold vision

In my experience, eye bankers want to help shape the future of eye banking, rather than react to changes advanced by others who may not be experts in our field or region. My vision is that this journal will unite eye bankers around the world and take our profession to the next level. We will discover how to

learn faster, innovate better, and foster increased purposeful collaboration among all eye banks. By working together, eye bankers, corneal surgeons, and researchers will be driving forces for the restoration of sight. We will efficiently and effectively create a future in which few individuals in the world will remain blind from corneal disease for very long.

A call to action

We invite you to become involved and help shape our *International Journal of Eye Banking*. Your participation is essential for success. Please:

- Take the new [Reader Survey](#).
- [Register](#) (sign up for a free subscription).
- Spread the word to colleagues about the journal.
- Submit manuscripts. See our list of [content areas and types of articles](#).
- Offer to become a reviewer (or express an interest in learning how to).
- Suggest editorial board members from your region of the world.
- Share useful resources.
- [Make a donation](#) and show your support for the journal.
- Share your comments with the editor at: editor@eyebankingjournal.org.

The journal will evolve over time. We anticipate updating features to meet the readers' needs. Your manuscripts, participation, and insights will shape the future of this journal and the practice of eye banking. I am pleased that this inaugural issue features original Research articles, Global Perspectives, and Picture Challenges. We intend this journal to complement existing ophthalmology literature—not compete with it. I hope readers see the value of this resource and share it with colleagues.

In future issues we will continue to focus on original research and will also report important, timely information about eye bank regulations and standards from around the world. Ethics, healthcare reform, global perspectives, possibly meeting information, additional educational components (such as an interactive “comments” feature with Picture Challenges) are to come.

We thank those who made this launch possible: numerous individuals, eye bank associations around the world, my eye bank's medical director and department leadership, and the University of Minnesota and journal staff. We are especially grateful to the Minnesota Lions Vision Foundation for the very generous initial funding that made this launch possible.

We express our thanks to the authors and peer reviewers who have worked through the start-up process to ensure that our peer-review system is rigorous and sound. And finally, thank you to the Editorial Advisory Board members for their guidance, trust, and support of not only this journal, but of me as a new Editor-in-Chief. Please keep your suggestions coming!

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