

[OTSS Website](#)

Dear OTSS Members,

Greetings and welcome to the Winter 2025 Ocular Toxicology Specialty Section (OTSS) newsletter. I hope everyone has been having a good year since our last newsletter in the Spring. This year, I am honored to serve as your President and work with our exceptionally talented and dedicated OTSS Board. These are exciting times in ophthalmology, with bold discoveries occurring regularly in the front and back of the eye. OTSS is proud of its mission to support members and advance ocular toxicology.

OTSS is a thriving Specialty Section in SOT with, at last count, 106 SOT members and 283 LinkedIn followers. OTSS has a great membership base that is very diversified with SOT Members from biotech, big pharma, chemical companies, contract laboratory organizations, consulting businesses, academia, government, and animal welfare organizations, among others. Your Executive Committee is similarly well-represented from these areas and supports providing a diversified scientific program throughout the year for all its members.

I especially want to thank our Sponsors, who financially support a number of OTSS Awards for our members. These sponsors are committed to supporting the next generation of ocular toxicology scientists and enable OTSS to achieve its mission of encouraging and recognizing members as one means of advancing ocular toxicology. Our 2024-2025 [Awards](#) with sponsors are listed below.

- Taylor & Francis “Paper of the Year” Award Sponsored by **Taylor & Francis**
- OTSS Best Poster Award Sponsored by **Pharmaron**
- OTSS I2 Award (Innovation and Impact) Sponsored by **JOINN-Biomere**
- OTSS Graduate Student and Postdoctoral Fellow Trainee Support Award Sponsored by **JOINN-Biomere**
- OTSS Biennial Career Achievement Award Sponsored by **Greenfield Pathology Services**

In addition, voting for new officers, those that will start in May 2025, will occur in January or February 2025. There will be two Executive Committee positions on the ballot this year: 1) Vice-President Elect and 2) Councilor. Several OTSS members have already volunteered for these offices.

In 2025, OTSS will again be hosting a [virtual business meeting](#) (Feb 17, 2025; 12-1 PM EST) prior to the in-person reception at the SOT Annual Meeting (Wednesday, March 19 in Orlando, FL). During the virtual meeting event, among other activities, the Biennial Career Achievement Award in ocular toxicology will be announced, with the winner giving a short presentation on the topic of their choice. The OTSS Board encourages everyone to attend these great meetings and support OTSS!

## Officers

### **President**

William (Bill) Cook

### **Vice President**

Ling Huang

### **Vice President-Elect**

Neera Tewari-Singh

### **Treasurer**

Suvidha Menon

### **Communications Officer**

Ewa Budzynski

### **Past President**

Andrea Rodrigues

### **Councilors**

Yu-Quan Wen  
Napoleon Alejandro

### **Postdoctoral Representative**

Jonathan Lin

### **Student Representative**

Oluchukwu  
Okoyeocha

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We are all thankful for our stellar Program Committee led by Dr. Ling Huang. OTSS is sponsoring two sessions at the SOT Annual Meeting in Orlando this year:

1. Seeing Ocular Pathology: Best Practices for Ophthalmic Endpoints in Ocular Toxicity Studies (CE Course)
2. Beyond Inflammation: Toxicities Associated with Ocular Therapeutics (Symposium)

The Program Committee has also been actively planning a number of other webinars and symposiums, including ocular cell therapy, ocular gene therapy, ocular drug development in minipigs, ocular drug development considerations in African Green monkeys, and ocular device safety.

OTSS has been looking for new ways to contribute to mentoring at SOT, and among the efforts by OTSS this upcoming year, I will personally be participating in a Graduate Student Leadership Committee (GSLC) panel discussion (webinar) for students on "[Navigating the Transition: From Academia to Industry](#)" on February 19, 2025 from 1-2 PM EST.

Finally, I wish everyone well and hope to see as many of you as possible in person at the OTSS reception at the SOT Annual Meeting in Orlando, FL.

Best Regards,  
Bill Cook, DVM, PhD, DABT, DABVT  
OTSS President

## Program Committee - A Year in Review

The OTSS Program Committee organized two webinars 2024:

1. ["IPSC-Derived Retinal Pigment Epithelium Replacement Therapy for Macular Degeneration: From Bench to Bedside"](#) by Dr. Arvydas Maminishkis from NEI/NIH
2. ["General Considerations of Using Non-Human Primate in NonClinical Ocular Drug Research"](#) by Dr. Eric (Wankun) Xie from JOINN Laboratories

OTSS also sponsored a well-attended symposium at the 2024 SOT Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City, UT titled "Taking a Closer Look at Biological Evaluations for Ocular Medical Devices and Combination Products." The symposium was organized by Andrea Rodrigues and William Cook.

We would like to thank all the presenters and contributors for preparing and delivering engaging and informative presentations.

The OTSS Program Committee is preparing for the 2025 Annual Meeting in Orlando, FL, where we are sponsoring two engaging sessions:

1. Continuing Education Course ([PM13](#)) titled "Seeing Ocular Pathology: Best Practices for Ophthalmic Endpoints in Ocular Toxicity Studies" chaired by Napoleon Alejandro and Jonathan Luisi
2. Symposium titled "Beyond Inflammation: Toxicities Associated with Ocular Therapeutics" chaired by Eunice Musvasva and Helen Booler

We are also working on a mentorship webinar to be scheduled in April 2025, titled: *Eyes on your career goals, perspective from ocular toxicologists*. Speakers include: Simon Blanco (FDA), Betina Lew (J&J), and Kathleen Krenzer (IUVO Biosciences).

If you would like to join the OTSS Program Committee, please reach out to Ling Huang at [lhuang64@ITS.JNJ.com](mailto:lhuang64@ITS.JNJ.com).

## Upcoming Events:

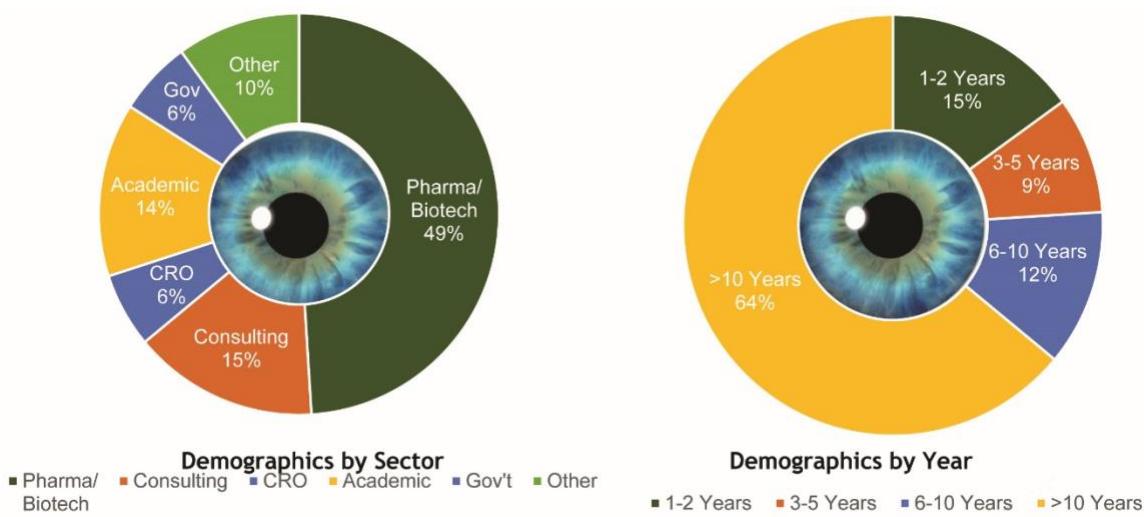
1. **January/February** – Vote for:
  - a. Junior Councilor
  - b. Vice-President Elect
2. **17 February** - [OTSS Virtual Business Meeting](#) 12-1 PM EST
3. **19 February** – [Navigating the Transition: From Academia to Industry](#) 1-2 PM EST
4. **16-20 March** – Annual Meeting in Orlando, FL
5. **16 March** - [Continuing Education Course \(PM13\)](#) titled [“Seeing Ocular Pathology: Best Practices for Ophthalmic Endpoints in Ocular Toxicity Studies”](#) 1:15-5 pm
6. **17 March** - Symposium titled [“Beyond Inflammation: Toxicities Associated with Ocular Therapeutics”](#) 9 am to noon ([Abstract # 1015-1020](#))
7. **19 March** – Join us for a great networking opportunity at the in-person reception in Orlando, FL
8. **April** – mentoring Webinar titled: *Eyes on career goals, perspective from ocular toxicologists*. Speakers: Simon Blanco (FDA), Betina Lew (J&J), and Kathleen Krenzer (IUVO Bioscience). Day and time: TBD

## Communications, Membership, and Treasurer Update

The OTSS Executive Committee would like to encourage our members to join the [OTSS LinkedIn](#), supporting students/postdocs who are in the ocular toxicology field.

As of November 2024, OTSS has assets of \$88,223.

OTSS membership currently consists of approximately 106 members.



## *Japanese Society of Comparative and Veterinary Ophthalmology (JSCVO) Update*

The forty-third JSCVO Annual Conference took place online on Aug. 31 and Sep 1, 2024, with the following presentations.

### **Special Lecture**

Dr. Hideaki Hara (Gifu Pharmaceutical University): “The interest of basic research in ophthalmology/Current status of translational research in drug discovery”

### **Educational Lecture**

Dr. Hiroaki Hara (Niigata Cancer Center Hospital): “Ocular toxicity of anticancer drugs”

### **46th JSCVO Fundamental Seminar: Frontiers in Ophthalmic Treatment Development**

Dr. Toshihide Kurihara (Keio University): “Development of ocular disease therapy based on the evolution of diverse photoreceptors”

Dr. Fumito Mikashima (PMDA): “Ophthalmic treatment of regenerative medicine products and their non-clinical evaluation”

Dr. Tatsuya Kamei (Sumitomo Pharma Co.): “Research and development of retinal regenerative medicine using allogenic iPS cells”

## Spotlight on Science: The Story Behind a Career in Ocular Toxicology

In this issue, we're thrilled to share the inspiring journey of Andrea Rodrigues, PhD, DABT, whose career in ocular toxicology was shaped by influential mentors, groundbreaking research, and a passion for advancing therapies in ophthalmology.

From an unexpected undergraduate pivot to a fulfilling career at the forefront of ocular toxicology, Andrea Rodrigues' story highlights the transformative power of mentorship, persistence, and innovation. With vision-restoring breakthroughs on the horizon, her journey reminds us of the critical importance of this work—and why passion drives progress.



### A SPARK IGNITED BY INNOVATION

For Andrea Rodrigues, the path to ocular toxicology began during graduate school at Rutgers University, where an incredible opportunity with Dr. Emmy Gordon became the driving force. "Dr. Gordon, a renowned cornea researcher, was part of a team studying the effects of sulfur mustard as a chemical warfare agent causing corneal toxicity," Dr. Rodrigues explained. "Through this project, I developed expertise in ocular tox study designs, formulation preparation, and ocular histopathology. It truly ignited my passion for ophthalmology." This was a chance to explore not only the intricacies of corneal health but also the broader impacts of toxicology on the eyes—a journey that continues to inspire Dr. Rodrigues to this day.

### THE EDUCATIONAL CROSSROADS

Sometimes, the most defining moments come from an unexpected pivot. During undergraduate studies at St. John's University, Dr. Rodrigues made a critical decision to leave the pharmacy program and transfer into toxicology. "I still wanted to remain in a related field, and thankfully, St. John's offered a toxicology bachelor's program," she shared. This decision led to early exposure to laboratory work under Dr. Blase Billack, who was researching nitrogen mustard effects *in vitro*.

"That experience laid the foundation for me to join Dr. Gordon's work at Rutgers," she recalled. "My knowledge of mustard compounds and an emerging love for ocular toxicology made the transition seamless."

### THE INFLUENCE OF MENTORSHIP

Throughout Dr. Rodrigues' career, mentorship has been a cornerstone of growth and inspiration. "Dr. Gordon and Dr. Billack were instrumental early on, but I also benefited from other mentors at Rutgers, including one committee member, Dr. Michael Gallo, who had consulted for a pharmaceutical company developing eye drops," she recounts.

When Dr. Rodrigues joined Allergan after graduate school in 2011, another wave of influential figures further shaped her perspective. "Mentors like Drs. Melva Rios Blanco, Anne Wiese, Brian Short, Chris Murphy, Steve Matsumoto, and Mayssa Attar inspired me to deepen my understanding," she explained. "I'm also thankful for CRO partners who brought valuable insights to running GLP ocular toxicity studies, which truly sharpened my skills."

These relationships reinforced her curiosity and cultivated a strong network of experts dedicated to the advancement of ophthalmic therapies.

#### A CAREER OF CONTINUOUS EVOLUTION

Over the years, Dr. Rodrigues has seen her skills—and the field itself—grow significantly. "Early on, I specialized in corneal therapies, mostly involving eye drop formulations," she shared. "Later, through consulting and working with biotech startups, I became involved in retinal therapies, including drugs delivered via intravitreal route."

Today, her experience spans treatments across diverse therapeutic modalities and routes of ocular administration, including subretinal and suprachoroidal gene therapies. "It's thrilling to be part of a field that's continually evolving, with new breakthroughs and an ever-expanding network of brilliant minds," she added. "I'm inspired by all the OTSS members and Program Committee that have such a desire to learn."

#### WHY THIS WORK MATTERS

When asked what keeps her motivated, Dr. Rodrigues is clear: the impact. "Vision-threatening diseases affect so many people—and will likely impact all of us or our loved ones," she stated. "Losing vision can be mentally, physically, and psychologically devastating. I'm committed to contributing in any way possible, especially as new technologies like cell and gene therapy show so much promise."

Looking to the future, Dr. Rodrigues is optimistic: "By 2040, I believe we'll see a significant boom in advancements for ocular therapies. It's exciting to be even a small part of that progress."

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Stay tuned for the next issue as we shine the spotlight on another inspiring innovator in ocular science and medicine!

## *OTSS Member Suggestions*

Please [send an email to a member of the EC](#), if you have any questions about the Ocular Toxicology Specialty Section.

## Supporters

We sincerely thank you for your generous support!!

2024-2025 Supporters



Taylor & Francis  
Online



### HELP US RECRUIT EMERGING TOXICOLOGISTS!

SOT ToxScholar program supports presentations to increase awareness of toxicology as a science and as a career field.

At institutions that are

- Primarily undergraduate
- With a high proportion of undergraduates from underrepresented groups
- In countries listed by the World Bank as low or middle income.



We need YOU to be a ToxScholar.



