

Robert C. Allen, MD (1950-2005)

Robert C. Allen, MD, an innovative and caring physician, died at his home in Richmond, Va, on March 24, 2005. During a brief but influential career, he made substantial contributions to ophthalmology in patient care, pharmacology research, and resident education. However, his most long-lasting impact may be in the field of uveal melanoma. After being diagnosed with this disease, he founded a nonprofit organization that may prove to be his most important accomplishment.

Robert Carroll Allen was born on November 18, 1950, in Baltimore, Md, and graduated from Duke University, Durham, NC, and the University of Virginia School of Medicine, Charlottesville. A preridency fellowship in ocular physiology and pharmacology at the W. K. Kellogg Foundation Laboratories of the Wilmer Ophthalmological Institute, in Baltimore, sparked a lifelong interest in glaucoma therapeutics, which he continued to study through a residency at the University of Florida, Gainesville, and 2 fellowships in glaucoma (clinical and research) at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary in Boston.

Bob served on the faculties of Emory University (Atlanta, Ga) and the University of Virginia before being appointed Professor of Ophthalmology and Pharmacology & Toxicology, as well as chairman of Ophthalmology at Virginia Commonwealth University (formerly Medical College of Virginia) in 1994. At Virginia Commonwealth University, he oversaw expansion of the faculty roster and physical facilities, as well as of the increased surgical volume and research productivity.

In a shortened career, Bob wrote over 70 articles, monographs, chapters, and abstracts, and he delivered invited lectures in 25 nations. Among his most important peer-reviewed publications were animal studies on topical clonidine and topical carbonic anhydrase inhibitors; early clinical trials of pilocarpine gel and betaxolol; advances in argon laser trabeculoplasty; and one of the first reports on filtration surgery for neovascular glaucoma. His recent finding that a single nucleotide polymorphism in the gene encoding the β_1 -adrenergic receptor correlates with the clinical response to betaxolol in normal volunteers represents a potentially noteworthy step in the evolving field of ophthalmic pharmacogenomics.

Bob was an initial member of the American Glaucoma Society, an associate examiner for the American Board of



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Ophthalmology, a volunteer for ORBIS International, and an investigator for the Advanced Glaucoma Intervention Study. When he received the American Academy of Ophthalmology's Senior Achievement Award in 2000, he was only the second Virginian to do so. He chaired the American Academy of Ophthalmology's Committee on Ophthalmic Drugs and served on

the Food and Drug Administration's Advisory Committee on Anti-Infectives and Ophthalmic Drugs.

Outside of ophthalmology, Bob was devoted to his family, including his wife, Janice (a former oncology nurse), and his sons Grant, Matthew, and Connor. He was quite active in church and community affairs, as well as being an avid tennis player, oenophile, and college basketball fan.

In 2000, Bob was diagnosed with ciliochoroidal melanoma. Although his subsequent enucleation forced him to withdraw from a busy surgical practice, he continued his clinical, research, teaching, and administrative duties until the discovery, in 2003, of liver metastases. With a combination of willpower and several innovative treatment regimens (including percutaneous hepatic perfusion with melphalan), Bob survived 22 months, an exceptional length of time with this condition.

During this time, Bob and Grant founded the nonprofit Ocular Melanoma Foundation (www.ocularmelanoma.org), envisioned as a resource for clinicians, researchers, and patients with an interest in the disorder. Hopefully, this organization will flourish and provide significant assistance toward improved treatment of uveal melanoma. This would potentially represent Bob's greatest contribution to ophthalmology, as well as a posthumous victory over his disease.

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