

Preserving the Culture of Innovation in Retina

In September, many of us traveled to Rome to attend the Retina Society meeting. One's first visit to the Eternal City often inspires awe at the vast amount of history that sits amid daily city life. In existence for approximately 2800 years, the city displays architectural and cultural evidence from the Ancient civilization, the Roman Empire, the Medieval period, the Renaissance, to modern civilization. With the relatively brief history of the United States, Americans often find themselves at a loss to comprehend passing by such ancient ruins, such as the Colosseum and the Roman Forum, on a daily commute—yet this is the way of life for most modern-day Romans.

Italy is home to a wealth of architectural and historic treasures, many of which are in constant flux of restoration and preservation efforts. This relatively small country has more United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization World Heritage sites deemed to have outstanding universal value from a cultural and historic standpoint than any other country in the world.¹ However, the country's cultural budget has been a casualty of the financial crisis that continues to plague Europe. According to an article in *Newsweek*, the Italian cultural budget was cut by roughly half in the last 3 years—from \$603 million to \$340 million—leaving not nearly enough money to provide for the maintenance and preservation of Italy's cultural and historic sites.² Without the proper care, many of these sites could fall to ruin, negating decades or hundreds of years of restoration, and robbing future generations of these treasures.

What does all of this have to do with retina in general, and this issue of *Retina Today* in particular? This edition focuses on the future of our subspecialty: retina research and development (R&D). Broadly, the Italian cultural crisis might be seen as analogous to the retina subspecialty during a time of government funding cuts with respect

to health care. Retina's plethora of innovations and therapies currently in development require not only intellectual but also financial resources to maintain. Our own country's economic situation does not appear to position public funding sources in such a way that they can be reliable sources for R&D efforts. Thus, it may behoove physicians and industry to redouble the efforts in fine-tuning protocols for the most productive and ethical research results.

The introduction of antivascular endothelial growth factor agents less than a decade ago ushered in a period of robust advancements in retina. We are currently on the lip of a new wave of therapies that will continue to improve outcomes for our patients. As the

world tightens its belt around a shrinking economy, we can only hope that the momentum in retina research is not negatively affected. ■



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1. UNESCO. World Heritage list. Available at: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list>.
2. Nadeau BL. Italy's luxury bailout. July 17, 2011. Available at: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2011/07/17/italy-s-ancient-monuments-and-cultural-heritage-crumbling.html>.