NDRI national survey finds Americans strongly support organ and tissue donation for research

A strong majority of Americans (93%) agree that donated organs and tissues help researchers make scientific breakthroughs according to a survey released in February commissioned by Research!America in partnership with NDRI.

However, despite immense support for donations and recognition of the tremendous need for more organs and tissues to be donated for both transplant and research, only about half of the respondents said they were registered organ or tissue donors.

“The gifts of organ and tissue donations are selfless acts of generosity that provide opportunities to advance discovery, improve health, and save lives,” said Bill Leinweber, President and CEO of NDRI. “For forty years, NDRI has been a world leader in the procurement and distribution of organs and tissues for research across the full spectrum of disease and disorders. Knowing that the public values this research and wants us to continue to do more of it means that we have to tell more of our story.”

continued on page 3
As we go to print with this edition of NDRI’s Research Nexus the United States and a growing list of nations around the world are on various levels of “lockdown” mandated by authorities to help halt the spread of the Coronavirus, COVID-19. A respiratory illness that can spread from person to person, the virus that causes COVID-19 was first identified during an investigation into an outbreak in Wuhan, China.

Forty-years ago, the National Diabetes Research Interchange was founded to support the advancement of research identified as critical for treatments and potentially a cure for Type I diabetes. Access to human pancreas, essential for the study of human islet cells and the potential role of these cells in treating the disease, was difficult and sporadic. Under the leadership of NDRI’s founding President and CEO, Lee Ducat, NDRI led the development of systemic processes and procedures that provided researchers with an ongoing, reliable source of high-quality pancreas. Streamlined access to pancreas, made possible by NDRI, forever changed the trajectory of diabetes-related research.

Investigators committed to advancing research on a wide variety of other diseases observed NDRI’s contributions to propel diabetes-related research. A cadre of influential researchers urged Ducat to expand her organization’s efforts beyond the procurement of pancreas. In a few short years, NDRI (now known as the National Disease Research Interchange) successfully embarked on the procurement and distribution of nearly all human organs and tissues – both diseased and normal – to support biomedical research. This expansion also paved the way for NDRI to become a long-term (over 30 years) trusted partner for multiple National Institutes of Health (NIH) institutes, corporations, foundations, pharmaceutical, and patient advocacy groups with research objectives to advance our understanding of non-diseased, common disease, and rare disease states across all body systems.

Access to human organs and tissues has been and continues to be essential to elucidating pathways for treatments and cures for countless diseases. Pancreatic tissue, birth tissue, ocular tissue, liver tissue, brain tissue, lymphatic tissue and more serve as the foundation for the answers scientists seek to understand and treat cancer, HIV-AIDS, diabetes, arthritis, heart disease, autism, lung disease, ALS and so many additional diseases and disabilities. There should be no doubt that human tissue will prove to be critical in the understanding of COVID-19 and other diseases that have yet to emerge.

With a sense of urgency and renewed commitment, the NDRI Board of Directors and staff pledge to utilize our expertise and resources efficiently and effectively to contribute to scientific advancement and discovery. We’re forty-years old – and we’re just getting started!

President’s Message

Bill Leinweber
President & CEO
National Disease Research Interchange
NDRI celebrates 40 years of empowering research and discovery with service to science awards dinner

NDRI will celebrate its 40-year journey as a world leader in the procurement and distribution of organs and tissues for research by honoring individuals and organizations whose achievements and contributions truly exemplify service to science at the organization’s highly anticipated Service to Science Awards Dinner, November 12, 2020 in Philadelphia.

Susan Hockfield, PhD
D. Walter Cohen, DDS

Service to Science Award

The evening’s highest honor — the D. Walter Cohen, DDS, Service to Science Award — will be presented to Susan Hockfield, PhD, President Emerita and Professor of Neuroscience at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). This prestigious award recognizes a distinguished research career, which spans multiple disciplines, including neuroscience and cancer research.

NDRI’s esteemed honoree served as the 16th president of MIT from 2004—2014 — and was the first life scientist and the first woman in that role. She recently authored The Age of Living Machines: How Biology Will Build the Next Technology Revolution, a popular science introduction to the convergence of biology and engineering technologies in the 21st century.

In one of her pioneering studies as a biologist, Dr. Hockfield used monoclonal antibody technology in brain research to identify proteins through which neural activity early in life affects brain development. She also helped shape national policy for energy and next-generation scientific research with the use of human tissue and the critical role that all components of the research ecosystem — academia, industry and government — play in advancing discovery to improve health across the globe, “said Mary J.C. Hendrix, PhD, Chair of the Board for NDRI.

David C. Fajgenbaum, MBA, MS, MD
Excellence in Research and Patient Advocacy Award

A physician, researcher and patient himself, David C. Fajgenbaum, MD, MBA, MS, of the University of Pennsylvania knows just how precious blood and tissue samples are to the advancement of medical knowledge. In the prime of his own medical training, Dr. Fajgenbaum was blindsided by debilitating symptoms that turned out to be the rare, mysterious and potentially deadly Idiopathic Multicentric Castleman Disease. Determined to find a treatment — if not a cure — that didn’t otherwise exist, Dr. Fajgenbaum dove into scientific research, collecting his own blood and lymph node samples understanding that they would be key to unlocking the mystery of Castleman Disease, the relentless condition that was attacking his body’s own immune system and causing his organs to shut down.

Dr. Fajgenbaum’s determination and discoveries proved to be a triumph in the promise of precision medicine and global scientific collaboration. His story has been highlighted by the New York Times, Science, The Today Show and Reader’s Digest, among others, and he is the author of Chasing My Cure among others, and he is the author of Chasing My Cure, describing how he used his medical training and crowdsourcing among patients and researchers to initiate a paradigm shift in how doctors research and treat Castleman Disease.

In the truest sense of patient advocacy, Dr. Fajgenbaum co-founded the Castleman Disease Collaborative Network in 2012 to accelerate research and treatments — not only for himself, but for the estimated 7,000 others who share this journey. His hope is to create a blueprint for accelerating research for other diseases, as well.

Gift of Life Donor Program of Philadelphia
Legacy Partnership Award

The partnership between NDRI and The Gift of Life Donor Program (GLDP) of Philadelphia has provided a powerful way to leave a meaningful legacy through research.

Howard Nathan, President and CEO of the Gift of Life Donor Program of Philadelphia and a member of the NDRI Board of Directors, will accept NDRI’s Legacy Partnership Award on behalf of his organization, which is one of the largest and oldest procurement organizations in the U.S. and NDRI’s longest organ procurement organization partner. Nathan is considered one of the world’s leading authorities on organ and tissue donation and has helped shape organ donation policies in the U.S. for nearly four decades.

Under Nathan’s leadership, GLDP continuously leads the nation in organ donation. In 2019, for the 12th consecutive year, GLDP of Philadelphia was the nation’s leading organ procurement organization (OPO), coordinating the most life-saving organs for transplant among all 58 U.S. OPOs. The organization broke two national records this past year, with the highest annual totals for organ donors and transplants ever recorded for a U.S.-based OPO.

In addition to their service as an OPO, Gift of Life provides a “home away from home” for transplant patients’ families at their Gift of Life Family House, where the organization’s Home Cook Heroes Program brings together volunteers from organizations throughout the greater Philadelphia community to ensure all transplant families have a home-cooked meal during their stay.

The evening’s highest honor — the D. Walter Cohen, DDS, Service to Science Award — will be presented to Susan Hockfield, PhD, President Emerita and Professor of Neuroscience at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). This prestigious award recognizes a distinguished research career, which spans multiple disciplines, including neuroscience and cancer research.

NDRI’s esteemed honoree served as the 16th president of MIT from 2004—2014 — and was the first life scientist and the first woman in that role. She recently authored The Age of Living Machines: How Biology Will Build the Next Technology Revolution, a popular science introduction to the convergence of biology and engineering technologies in the 21st century.

In one of her pioneering studies as a biologist, Dr. Hockfield used monoclonal antibody technology in brain research to identify proteins through which neural activity early in life affects brain development. She also helped shape national policy for energy and next-generation scientific research with the use of human tissue and the critical role that all components of the research ecosystem — academia, industry and government — play in advancing discovery to improve health across the globe, “said Mary J.C. Hendrix, PhD, Chair of the Board for NDRI.

David C. Fajgenbaum, MBA, MS, MD
Excellence in Research and Patient Advocacy Award

A physician, researcher and patient himself, David C. Fajgenbaum, MD, MBA, MS, of the University of Pennsylvania knows just how precious blood and tissue samples are to the advancement of medical knowledge. In the prime of his own medical training, Dr. Fajgenbaum was blindsided by debilitating symptoms that turned out to be the rare, mysterious and potentially deadly Idiopathic Multicentric Castleman Disease. Determined to find a treatment — if not a cure — that didn’t otherwise exist, Dr. Fajgenbaum dove into scientific research, collecting his own blood and lymph node samples understanding that they would be key to unlocking the mystery of Castleman Disease, the relentless condition that was attacking his body’s own immune system and causing his organs to shut down.

Dr. Fajgenbaum’s determination and discoveries proved to be a triumph in the promise of precision medicine and global scientific collaboration. His story has been highlighted by the New York Times, Science, The Today Show and Reader’s Digest, among others, and he is the author of Chasing My Cure among others, and he is the author of Chasing My Cure, describing how he used his medical training and crowdsourcing among patients and researchers to initiate a paradigm shift in how doctors research and treat Castleman Disease.

In the truest sense of patient advocacy, Dr. Fajgenbaum co-founded the Castleman Disease Collaborative Network in 2012 to accelerate research and treatments — not only for himself, but for the estimated 7,000 others who share this journey. His hope is to create a blueprint for accelerating research for other diseases, as well.

Gift of Life Donor Program of Philadelphia
Legacy Partnership Award

The partnership between NDRI and The Gift of Life Donor Program (GLDP) of Philadelphia has provided a powerful way to leave a meaningful legacy through research.

Howard Nathan, President and CEO of the Gift of Life Donor Program of Philadelphia and a member of the NDRI Board of Directors, will accept NDRI’s Legacy Partnership Award on behalf of his organization, which is one of the largest and oldest procurement organizations in the U.S. and NDRI’s longest organ procurement organization partner. Nathan is considered one of the world’s leading authorities on organ and tissue donation and has helped shape organ donation policies in the U.S. for nearly four decades.

Under Nathan’s leadership, GLDP continuously leads the nation in organ donation. In 2019, for the 12th consecutive year, GLDP of Philadelphia was the nation’s leading organ procurement organization (OPO), coordinating the most life-saving organs for transplant among all 58 U.S. OPOs. The organization broke two national records this past year, with the highest annual totals for organ donors and transplants ever recorded for a U.S.-based OPO.

In addition to their service as an OPO, Gift of Life provides a “home away from home” for transplant patients’ families at their Gift of Life Family House, where the organization’s Home Cook Heroes Program brings together volunteers from organizations throughout the greater Philadelphia community to ensure all transplant families have a home-cooked meal during their stay.

40th Anniversary Service to Science Awards Dinner Thursday, November 12, 2020
The Union League of Philadelphia

Reserve tickets online at ndriresource.org/40
For sponsorship opportunities, contact
Eileen Falchetta, Director, Marketing & Communications 215-557-7361, ext. 239
NDRI40@ndriresource.org

40 years of partnership
Throughout NDRI’s 40-year history, the organization has partnered with more than 130 tissue source sites, including organ procurement organizations, tissue banks, eye banks and hospitals to provide some 500 scientists annually from across the globe with human specimens to advance research toward treatments and cures to improve the lives of patients and their families — without these partnerships NDRI’s mission simply would not be possible.
Partnership with NDRI leads to groundbreaking discoveries for renowned diabetes researcher

Using human pancreas and pancreatic islets from NDRI’s Tissue Source Site Network, Dr. Alvin C. Powers and his team at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville have made groundbreaking discoveries over the last decade regarding the causes and treatment of diabetes. One in 11 Americans have diabetes and the number of diagnosis continues to grow. With NDRI’s help, using human pancreas and pancreatic islets as one of their experimental models, the Vanderbilt team hopes to change that trajectory.

Dr. Powers’ research focuses on the cells in the pancreatic islets that secrete insulin and glucagon to regulate blood sugar levels. Dr. Powers’ team has made critical discoveries in understanding how dysfunction of pancreatic islets leads to the development of various forms of diabetes, including type 1 diabetes, type 2 diabetes, cystic fibrosis-related diabetes, and the diabetes that sometimes occurs in individuals treated with immunosuppressive drugs. Their research has also led to new information about a rare type of diabetes known as monogenic diabetes.

Dr. Powers is the Joe C. Davis Chair in Biologic Science and Professor of Medicine, Molecular Physiology and Biophysics at Vanderbilt. He is also the Director of the Vanderbilt Diabetes Center, Chief of the Vanderbilt Division of Diabetes, Endocrinology, and Metabolism, and the Director of the Vanderbilt Diabetes Research and Training Center, a National Institutes of Health-funded center that facilitates the diabetes-related research of more than 120 Vanderbilt scientists, and a staff physician at the Veterans Administration Tennessee Valley Healthcare System. Dr. Powers has partnered with NDRI for more than 10 years in his studies.

“There is no other way to obtain pancreatic tissue for research and only by studying human tissue and cells we will understand what causes the various forms of diabetes and develop targeted therapies. This is why having access to human pancreatic tissue and islets through our partnership with NDRI is so important,” Dr. Powers says.

National Institute on Aging funding supports NDRI in addressing biospecimen research gaps for Alzheimer’s

A supplemental grant from the National Institute on Aging (NIA), combined with continued funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), allows NDRI’s Human Tissue and Organs for Research Resource (HTORR) to increase its focus on Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias.

NIH’s ongoing support of the HTORR — now more than 30 consecutive years of funding — helps NDRI address current gaps in research by developing a comprehensive human biospecimen resource that provides highly annotated biospecimens from living and post-mortem donors to advance scientific discovery.

In the first year of the NIA grant, NDRI led biospecimen collection and distribution that aligned with unmet or under-represented human biospecimen needs in the field of Alzheimer’s disease and related dementia research. Now heading into year two, NDRI will use the funding to continue to identify and authorize post mortem donors and living patients to coordinate the recovery of biospecimens with associated disease-specific donor data.

The HTORR will also assist in the distributing biospecimens and donor data to investigators. NDRI presented on this work at the Society for Neuroscience meeting in Chicago in fall of 2019.

Learn more about NDRI’s work to support Alzheimer’s research at www.ndriresource.org/alzheimers.
Researcher Reflections

An average of 150 publications per year are published by investigators who receive tissue from NDRI. Investigator publications cover a broad spectrum of scientific research areas, including cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular, musculoskeletal, neuroscience, and respiratory research. Below is a sample of publications from NDRI investigators in 2019, alongside photos of the investigators themselves.

A full list of publications can be found on NDRI’s website: ndriresource.org/for-researchers/publications

**HIV Research**

In searching to find cures for HIV, protective concentrations of antiretrovirals (ARVs) in the lymph node are important to prevent vulnerable cells from infection. Factors responsible for drug distribution and concentration of the infection in tissues are still unknown. This study investigated the influence of drug transporter expression, viral infection, and sex on ARV penetration within lymph nodes of animal models and humans.


**Autism Research**

Little is known about the development of autism pathology and the disruption of fluid in the brain. These researchers study regions of the brain from individuals with and without autism and neuron activity.


**Lung Disease Research**

Current in vitro human lung cell models derived from adult tissues may not accurately represent all attributes that define stability and disease mechanisms in a pediatric lung. This study demonstrated that these cells provide a novel in vitro human cell model that represents the tissues in pediatric airway can be used to study perinatal developmental and pediatric disease mechanisms.


**Ocular Research**

Each layer of the eye plays a role in sight, especially layers cushioned by the cornea. This study examined the feasibility of using a 3-dimensional constructed cornea that consisted of human cornea fibroblasts.


“Transplantation should of course always come first, when possible, to help the one person receiving the organ. But the donation for research will help millions of people as we learn to prevent and treat common as well as rare diseases.”

Gloria S. Pryhuber MD
Professor, Department of Pediatrics, Neonatology (SMD)
University of Rochester

“Transplantation should of course always come first, when possible, to help the one person receiving the organ. But the donation for research will help millions of people as we learn to prevent and treat common as well as rare diseases.”

Gloria S. Pryhuber MD
Professor, Department of Pediatrics, Neonatology (SMD)
University of Rochester

“Transplantation should of course always come first, when possible, to help the one person receiving the organ. But the donation for research will help millions of people as we learn to prevent and treat common as well as rare diseases.”

Gloria S. Pryhuber MD
Professor, Department of Pediatrics, Neonatology (SMD)
University of Rochester

“I could not continue in science without the services provided by NDRI. The human eyes we obtain from NDRI are the backbone of our research.”

Gerard A. Lutty, PhD
G. Edward and G. Britton Durell Professor of Ophthalmology
Wilmer Ophthalmological Institute

"What a wonderful organization NDRI has been over these many years. Were it not for the availability of precious tissues supplied by NDRI, this field of biomedical and bioscience research would not be where it is right now."

Francis S. Collins, MD, PhD
Director, National Institutes of Health

“Our work depends on frequent acquisition of both normal and diseased viable human organs, with a national network for procurement, 24/7 staffing and the use of efficient courier services, NDRI is a critical partner.”

Richard Kurten, PhD
Associate Professor, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences
The world of biomedical and bioscience research has advanced exponentially since the National Disease Research Interchange (NDRI) retrieved its first tissue in 1981. Donor registries and biorepositories have been established, partnerships with tissue source sites, recovery partners, public and private funding sources and the global research community have formed and strengthened. Data has been collected, discoveries continue to be made, new questions are answered, and lives have been changed.

In less than two years, NDRI’s new Lyme Disease Tissue Program has become a valuable addition to the Bay Area Lyme Foundation’s Lyme Disease Biobank, which was established to advance understanding of this complex disease. In addition to collecting tissue, the biobank also collects blood and urine samples, which have supported 50 research projects. The Lyme Disease Tissue Program includes tissues from surgical donations, as well as collection of multiple tissues from post mortem Lyme disease donors, which will help drive research advancements aimed at understanding and combating the Lyme bacteria’s ability to invade tissues and organs.

Key to the program is the partnership with MyLymeData Patient Registry, which connects donor profiles with tissue samples and offers researchers a fuller data set of donors’ Lyme disease history. NDRI and the Bay Area Lyme Foundation jointly presented about the program’s progress at Lyme Disease Association annual conference (Philadelphia, September 2019) and LymeMind (New York, October 2019).

Researchers interested in studying these tissue samples should contact info@lymebiobank.org.

Congratulations to The Center for Organ Recovery and Education (CORE), a Pittsburgh, PA-based organ procurement organization recognized by NDRI and the Association of Organ Procurement Organizations (AOPO) at the AOPO annual meeting in June 2019 as the inaugural recipient of the Empowering Research and Discovery Award for outstanding commitment to the advancement of research. NDRI worked closely with AOPO to develop the award, which will annually recognize organ procurement organizations that partner with NDRI to advance biomedical research.

CORE was selected as the inaugural honoree for their outstanding performance in providing nearly 600 organs, tissues, corneas and neurologic tissues to NDRI, while supporting more than 50 investigators and projects in discovery areas including transplantation, pharmaceutical development, immunology, neuroscience, search & rescue, medical device development and clinical education and training. CORE facilitated 420 research-authorized donors in 2018, resulting in more than 1,200 gifts supporting research and education. CORE also had the distinction of publishing and/or presenting 16 separate research studies.

Those who are interested in learning more or wish to be screened as potential donors to help advance Lyme disease research may register online through NDRI’s Private Donor Program at www.ndriresource.org/lyme-disease or by calling NDRI at 800-222-NDRI (6374), option 5. Researchers interested in studying these tissue samples should contact info@lymebiobank.org.
Spotlight: Board Member

Hal E. Broxmeyer PhD, is a lifesaver and a leader. In 1988 as a human cord blood researcher, he traveled to Paris with a small freezer package of stem cells in-hand for the world's first successful cord blood stem cell transplant. It was a mission that helped make way for thousands of cord blood stem cell transplants that would save the lives of countless children with a variety of diseases, including leukemia.

He brings that same passion and drive for the importance of human tissue in bioscience research to his leadership role on the NDRI Board of Directors.

“I enjoy helping NDRI fulfill its highly notable goal of improving health care by helping researchers and clinical investigators get the tissues and organs they need to further their experimental work,” said Dr. Broxmeyer, who has served as a director for more than 20 years and was Board Chair in 2007. “I enjoy getting to meet, interact and talk with many outstanding Board colleagues, from whom I have learned so much.”

Through his own research — peer-review funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) since 1978 — Dr. Broxmeyer established human cord blood as a source of hematopoietic stem cells for transplant.

Hal Broxmeyer, PhD
NDRI Board Member
Distinguished Professor, Mary Margaret Walther Professor Emeritus, and a full-time Professor of Microbiology and Immunology at the Indiana University School of Medicine

Cord blood expert Hal Broxmeyer’s passion and drive is “priceless” for bioscience research and the NDRI Board

He is the Distinguished Professor, Mary Margaret Walther Professor Emeritus, and a full-time Professor of Microbiology and Immunology at the Indiana University School of Medicine. He was recently awarded an Outstanding Investigator Award from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) of the NIH and the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Cord Blood Association.

In 2010, this central figure in the maturation of cord blood banking and therapies was president of the American Society of Hematology (ASH), the world's largest professional society that addresses the causes of and remedies for blood disorders, and in 1991 he was president of the International Society for Experimental Hematology and Stem Cell Research (ISEH). He has written and co-authored more than 790 papers and review articles pertaining to the science and mechanisms of blood cell regulation and of cord blood stem cells. He continues to study means to make cord blood transplantation a more efficacious clinical procedure through mechanistically based experimental research.
NDRI Leadership Updates

Robert Zipperlen, CPA
Chief Financial Officer and Vice President, Administration

Robert (Bob) Zipperlen, CPA, joined NDRI in the spring of 2019 as the Vice President of Administration & CFO. Prior to NDRI, he served as CFO of the Renfew Center, an eating disorders treatment facility headquartered in Philadelphia with multiple locations across the country. Mr. Zipperlen partnered with the executive management team to grow the organizations top and bottom line, oversaw the opening of five outpatient sites, and enhanced operational and financial accountability. Prior to his tenure with the Renfew Center, he served as the CFO of Society for Hospital Medicine which is based in Philadelphia. He has over 20 years of experience demonstrating financial and operational leadership to for-profit and non-profit organizations.

Mr. Zipperlen received his undergraduate degree in accounting from Temple University, and has served as Director at Large and Finance Committee Member for Temple University’s Fox School of Business Alumni Association since 2017. He is a licensed CPA in Pennsylvania and was recognized as 2016 CFO of the year honoree by the Philadelphia Business Journal.

Thomas J. Bell, MS, PhD
Senior Vice President, Strategic Initiatives

Thomas J. Bell, MS, PhD, who has been with NDRI since 2010, was promoted in March 2020 to Senior Vice President, Strategic Initiatives. Dr. Bell has served in a variety of capacities at NDRI. Prior to his current role he served as Vice President of Operations and Director of NDRI’s biopreservation. He also previously led NDRI’s Scientific Services and various marketing efforts. Dr. Bell approaches his work with enthusiasm, a strong technical understanding of how we fulfill our mission and the importance of collaboration in doing so.

In his role as Senior Vice President, Strategic Initiatives, Dr. Bell will be responsible for developing strategic partner relationships with scientific, corporate, government, and philanthropic entities. Dr. Bell will work to identify emerging opportunities with existing and new partners, including being the primary contact for NDRI’s human and organ research resource programs with the NIH.

Dr. Bell has more than 20 years of experience in biomedical research and has taught summer courses at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratories for over 10 years. He has published numerous articles, patents, abstracts and book chapters in the fields of neurophysiology and molecular neuroscience. Dr. Bell completed a National Institutes of Health (NIH)-funded training postdoctoral fellowship in the Department of Systems Pharmacology and Translation Therapeutics at University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. He holds a doctorate from the Division of Biology and Medicine at Brown University.

Melissa VonDran, PhD
Vice President, Operations and Biorepository Director

Melissa VonDran, PhD, who has been with NDRI since 2015, was promoted in March 2020 to Vice President Operations & Director, Biorepository at NDRI. Dr. VonDran is responsible for strategy development as well as, day-to-day operations of the four functional components of NDRI’s Operations department: Fulfillment, Scientific Services, Site Management and Logistics Management. She also oversees NDRI’s College of American Pathologists (CAP) accredited biorepository.

She has been recognized by her peers and the external stakeholders with whom she has interacted for her outstanding commitment to customer service. Her promotion to Vice President of Operations is a testament to her dedication to the advancement of the mission of NDRI.

Dr. VonDran earned her doctoral degree in neuroscience and cell biology from Robert Wood Johnson Medical School at Rutgers University and completed a post-doctoral fellowship in the Department of Medicine at Weill Cornell Medical College. In this new capacity, she draws upon her own 10-year experience as an academic research scientist to translate the research community’s needs to new researcher recruitment and programs for NDRI.

Mary J.C. Hendrix, PhD
Chair of the Board
President, Shepherd University

Bill Leinweber
President & CEO, NDRI

Gwenhard Herlyn, DVM, DSc
Chairman Emeritus

Caspar, Wistar Professor in Melanoma Research
Director, The Wistar Institute Melanoma Research Center
Professor, Molecular and Cellular Oncogenesis Program
The Wistar Institute

Hal E. Bremmeyer, PhD
Chairman Emeritus

University of Chicago
President, Chicago/Northern Illinois ADA Board

Mary J.C. Hendrix, PhD

Emerging Business & Venture Capital Group

David Albert
Chairman Emeritus, NDRI

President & CEO, NDRI

Bill Leinweber

Mary J.C. Hendrix, PhD

Emerging Business & Venture Capital Group

David Albert
Chairman Emeritus, NDRI

Emerging Business & Venture Capital Group

Mary J.C. Hendrix, PhD

Emerging Business & Venture Capital Group

Robert Zipperlen, CPA
Chief Financial Officer and Vice President, Administration

Robert (Bob) Zipperlen, CPA, joined NDRI in the spring of 2019 as the Vice President of Administration & CFO. Prior to NDRI, he served as CFO of the Renfew Center, an eating disorders treatment facility headquartered in Philadelphia with multiple locations across the country. Mr. Zipperlen partnered with the executive management team to grow the organizations top and bottom line, oversaw the opening of five outpatient sites, and enhanced operational and financial accountability. Prior to his tenure with the Renfew Center, he served as the CFO of Society for Hospital Medicine which is based in Philadelphia. He has over 20 years of experience demonstrating financial and operational leadership to for-profit and non-profit organizations.

Mr. Zipperlen received his undergraduate degree in accounting from Temple University, and has served as Director at Large and Finance Committee Member for Temple University’s Fox School of Business Alumni Association since 2017. He is a licensed CPA in Pennsylvania and was recognized as 2016 CFO of the year honoree by the Philadelphia Business Journal.

Thomas J. Bell, MS, PhD
Senior Vice President, Strategic Initiatives

Thomas J. Bell, MS, PhD, who has been with NDRI since 2010, was promoted in March 2020 to Senior Vice President, Strategic Initiatives. Dr. Bell has served in a variety of capacities at NDRI. Prior to his current role he served as Vice President of Operations and Director of NDRI’s biopreservation. He also previously led NDRI’s Scientific Services and various marketing efforts. Dr. Bell approaches his work with enthusiasm, a strong technical understanding of how we fulfill our mission and the importance of collaboration in doing so.

In his role as Senior Vice President, Strategic Initiatives, Dr. Bell will be responsible for developing strategic partner relationships with scientific, corporate, government, and philanthropic entities. Dr. Bell will work to identify emerging opportunities with existing and new partners, including being the primary contact for NDRI’s human and organ research resource programs with the NIH.

Dr. Bell has more than 20 years of experience in biomedical research and has taught summer courses at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratories for over 10 years. He has published numerous articles, patents, abstracts and book chapters in the fields of neurophysiology and molecular neuroscience. Dr. Bell completed a National Institutes of Health (NIH)-funded training postdoctoral fellowship in the Department of Systems Pharmacology and Translation Therapeutics at University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. He holds a doctorate from the Division of Biology and Medicine at Brown University.

Melissa VonDran, PhD
Vice President, Operations and Biorepository Director

Melissa VonDran, PhD, who has been with NDRI since 2015, was promoted in March 2020 to Vice President Operations & Director, Biorepository at NDRI. Dr. VonDran is responsible for strategy development as well as, day-to-day operations of the four functional components of NDRI’s Operations department: Fulfillment, Scientific Services, Site Management and Logistics Management. She also oversees NDRI’s College of American Pathologists (CAP) accredited biorepository.

She has been recognized by her peers and the external stakeholders with whom she has interacted for her outstanding commitment to customer service. Her promotion to Vice President of Operations is a testament to her dedication to the advancement of the mission of NDRI.

Dr. VonDran earned her doctoral degree in neuroscience and cell biology from Robert Wood Johnson Medical School at Rutgers University and completed a post-doctoral fellowship in the Department of Medicine at Weill Cornell Medical College. In this new capacity, she draws upon her own 10-year experience as an academic research scientist to translate the research community’s needs to new researcher recruitment and programs for NDRI.

Board of Directors

The NDRI Board of Directors is comprised of leadership representing a cross-section of disciplines—experts in organ and tissue donation and preservation, accounting, finance and non-profit management, all of whom share their expertise to enable us to carry out our mission of advancing biomedical research.

Mary J.C. Hendrix, PhD
Chair of the Board
President, Shepherd University

Bill Leinweber
President & CEO, NDRI

Gwenhard Herlyn, DVM, DSc
Chairman Emeritus

Caspar, Wistar Professor in Melanoma Research
Director, The Wistar Institute Melanoma Research Center
Professor, Molecular and Cellular Oncogenesis Program
The Wistar Institute

Hal E. Bremmeyer, PhD
Chairman Emeritus, NDRI

Emerging Business & Venture Capital Group

Mary J.C. Hendrix, PhD

Emerging Business & Venture Capital Group

Robert Zipperlen, CPA
Chief Financial Officer and Vice President, Administration

Robert (Bob) Zipperlen, CPA, joined NDRI in the spring of 2019 as the Vice President of Administration & CFO. Prior to NDRI, he served as CFO of the Renfew Center, an eating disorders treatment facility headquartered in Philadelphia with multiple locations across the country. Mr. Zipperlen partnered with the executive management team to grow the organizations top and bottom line, oversaw the opening of five outpatient sites, and enhanced operational and financial accountability. Prior to his tenure with the Renfew Center, he served as the CFO of Society for Hospital Medicine which is based in Philadelphia. He has over 20 years of experience demonstrating financial and operational leadership to for-profit and non-profit organizations.

Mr. Zipperlen received his undergraduate degree in accounting from Temple University, and has served as Director at Large and Finance Committee Member for Temple University’s Fox School of Business Alumni Association since 2017. He is a licensed CPA in Pennsylvania and was recognized as 2016 CFO of the year honoree by the Philadelphia Business Journal.

Thomas J. Bell, MS, PhD
Senior Vice President, Strategic Initiatives

Thomas J. Bell, MS, PhD, who has been with NDRI since 2010, was promoted in March 2020 to Senior Vice President, Strategic Initiatives. Dr. Bell has served in a variety of capacities at NDRI. Prior to his current role he served as Vice President of Operations and Director of NDRI’s biopreservation. He also previously led NDRI’s Scientific Services and various marketing efforts. Dr. Bell approaches his work with enthusiasm, a strong technical understanding of how we fulfill our mission and the importance of collaboration in doing so.

In his role as Senior Vice President, Strategic Initiatives, Dr. Bell will be responsible for developing strategic partner relationships with scientific, corporate, government, and philanthropic entities. Dr. Bell will work to identify emerging opportunities with existing and new partners, including being the primary contact for NDRI’s human and organ research resource programs with the NIH.

Dr. Bell has more than 20 years of experience in biomedical research and has taught summer courses at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratories for over 10 years. He has published numerous articles, patents, abstracts and book chapters in the fields of neurophysiology and molecular neuroscience. Dr. Bell completed a National Institutes of Health (NIH)-funded training postdoctoral fellowship in the Department of Systems Pharmacology and Translation Therapeutics at University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. He holds a doctorate from the Division of Biology and Medicine at Brown University.

Melissa VonDran, PhD
Vice President, Operations and Biorepository Director

Melissa VonDran, PhD, who has been with NDRI since 2015, was promoted in March 2020 to Vice President Operations & Director, Biorepository at NDRI. Dr. VonDran is responsible for strategy development as well as, day-to-day operations of the four functional components of NDRI’s Operations department: Fulfillment, Scientific Services, Site Management and Logistics Management. She also oversees NDRI’s College of American Pathologists (CAP) accredited biorepository.

She has been recognized by her peers and the external stakeholders with whom she has interacted for her outstanding commitment to customer service. Her promotion to Vice President of Operations is a testament to her dedication to the advancement of the mission of NDRI.

Dr. VonDran earned her doctoral degree in neuroscience and cell biology from Robert Wood Johnson Medical School at Rutgers University and completed a post-doctoral fellowship in the Department of Medicine at Weill Cornell Medical College. In this new capacity, she draws upon her own 10-year experience as an academic research scientist to translate the research community’s needs to new researcher recruitment and programs for NDRI.
Conference Schedule

- Orthopedic Research Society (ORS)  
  February 9-11, Phoenix, AZ
- TAI Global Conference  
  February 12-13, Washington DC
- Bio International Convention (BIO IC)  
  Virtual Meeting
- Global Genes Rare Drug Development Symposium  
  June 11-12, Philadelphia, PA
- Eye Bank Association of America (EBAA)  
  June 17-20, Dallas, TX
- NACO - The Organization of Transplant Professionals  
  August 4-7, Kansas City, MO
- Military Health Research Symposium (MHSRS)  
  August 20-21, Kissimmee, FL
- Global Genes Rare Patient Advocacy Summit  
  September 21-23, San Diego CA
- NPod Annual OPO Workshop  
  October 6-8, St. Pete Beach, FL
- National Organization for Rare Disorders (NORD) Summit  
  October 8-9, Washington DC
- American Association of Tissue Banks (AATB)  
  October 12-15, Aurora, CO
- Cell and Gene Meeting on the Mesa  
  October 14-16, Carlsbad, CA
- Infectious Disease Society of America (IDSA)  
  ID Week October 21-25, Philadelphia PA
- Society of Neuroscience (SfN)  
  October 21-25, Philadelphia PA
- MEDICA  
  November 16-19, Germany

Conferences listed are meetings NDRI staff attends annually. This schedule is fluidly changing due to the growing effects of travel, and safety from the COVID-19 virus. Please check out website for the most up-to-date schedule. https://ndriresource.org/about-us/news-events/conference-schedule

NDRI mourns the passing of Dr. James D. Zieske, January 7, 2020. Dr. Zieske was an Associate Professor of Ophthalmology at Harvard Medical School (HMS) and a member of Harvard Ophthalmology’s Cornea Center of Excellence and Ocular Regenerative Medicine Institute. He was also a Senior Scientist at Schepens Eye Research Institute of Massachusetts Eye and Ear.

“A lot of people think if the tissue doesn’t get used for transplant, it’s kind of second-rate tissue or something. I’d like them to know that people who do research with human tissue are doing worthwhile things that are going to, hopefully, lead to cures for all kinds of diseases.” Dr. James D. Zieske

“Dr. Zieske of Harvard University’s Schepens Eye Research Institute told me they only get about 10 infant corneas a year and would request more if they could. Infant eyes are worth their weight in gold… because of their potential to regenerate. In fact, they said they were likely still using my son’s cells while I was there in the building! It was so healing!” Sarah Gray (donor’s mother) pictured with husband Ross and son Callum (below)

No down time for NDRI

NDRI’s Fulfillment team provides around-the-clock service and support 365 days a year to our researchers, tissue source sites (TSS), donors and donor families. Their efforts are indispensable to NDRI’s mission to provide project-specific human biospecimens to advance biomedical research.

Our Fulfillment team works in a highly time-sensitive manner to exhaustively screen donation opportunities presented by our TSS network against NDRI’s active researcher project and protocol requirements. In their daily interactions with our TSS partners and researcher, the team’s passion, professionalism and dedication to NDRI’s mission each play a key role in continually cultivating the organization’s relationships and partnerships.

The Fulfillment team’s efforts provide researchers with the human biospecimens needed to advance their work while remaining careful stewards of the precious, donated gifts they are presented.

We’ve moved!

NDRI relocates to Three Parkway in Philadelphia

We are pleased to announce the relocation of NDRI’s offices! Our new address is Three Parkway, 1601 Cherry Street, Suite 1700, Philadelphia PA 19102. Our new location allows for the combination of two sites — our College of American Pathologists (CAP) accredited biorepository facility and office space — easily accommodates our 24/7/365 services, and offers an innovative and collaborative environment for staff. Come visit us to learn more about NDRI’s leadership in advancing scientific discovery!

New automated tissue procurement system – Rhythm – provides enhancements for researchers and partner source sites:

NDRI launched its’ new procurement system in February 2020. Known as Rhythm, this state of the art system provides significant efficiency improvements for recording detailed protocols and matching the thousands of tissues, organs and biospecimens offered by our extensive network of tissue source sites.

The resulting system will improve reporting, integrate with other existing systems and ensure compliance with regulatory norms and guidelines for biomedical research and development.
In 1980, NDRI was founded to serve researchers human tissues and organs across the U.S. to support research towards a cure for diabetes. As the need for human biospecimens for research into many more diseases grew, so did NDRI's services. Today, NDRI serves hundreds of scientists around the world whose scientific endeavors span the full range of disease and disability.

NDRI supporting breakthrough discoveries with unmatched experience.

- Customized biospecimen acquisition and processing tailored to specific protocol requirements
- Responsive 24/7/365 call center for requests and biospecimen distribution
- Diverse experience distributing nearly every human tissue and organ type
- Ethical and regulation-compliant biomaterial acquisition and handling

800-222-6374 • www.ndriresource.org
General info: info@ndriresource.org
Sources: source@ndriresource.org
Researchers: research@ndriresource.org

NDRI is a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation and relies on support from the generosity of donors.