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Opus Genetics Appoints Ben Yerxa, Ph.D., as Permanent Chief Executive Officer

Industry veteran and experienced CEO will continue to lead the company as its AAV-based gene therapies for inherited retinal diseases approach the clinic

RESEARCH TRIANGLE PARK, N.C., June 21, 2022 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Opus Genetics, a patient-first gene therapy company developing treatments for inherited retinal diseases, today announced the appointment of Ben Yerxa, Ph.D., as Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Dr. Yerxa previously served as acting CEO of Opus, in addition to former roles as CEO of the Foundation Fighting Blindness and the Retinal Degeneration (RD) Fund, the venture arm of the Foundation focused on making venture philanthropy investments to further the Foundation's mission of accelerating research for preventing, treating and curing blinding diseases.

Opus is the first spin-off company internally conceived and launched by the RD Fund, and combines unparalleled insight and commitment to patient need with wholly owned AAV-based gene therapy programs in inherited retinal diseases, while creating novel manufacturing scale and efficiencies tailored for producing rare disease therapeutics.

"I'm exceptionally proud of the progress we've made toward our mission during my nearly five years at the Foundation, including the launch of the RD Fund to further the Foundation's mission through venture philanthropy," said Dr. Yerxa. "Stepping into the permanent CEO role at Opus Genetics – a company that we created and launched through the RD Fund – enables me to be on the front line of bringing potentially life-changing treatments to the patients who so urgently need them."

Dr. Yerxa continued, "More than 280 genes are known to cause inherited retinal diseases, and it's estimated that over 180,000 patients are waiting for treatments for their individual genetic conditions. Opus is combining the best instruments of science with patient need to grow and advance our pipeline of AAV-based gene therapies for inherited retinal diseases, and I'm pleased to continue leading the Opus team in this important work."

Dr. Yerxa has more than 25 years' experience in biotechnology, nonprofit and drug development and in translating promising research discoveries into clinical milestones and commercial launches in the ophthalmology, pulmonary, rare disease, cardiovascular and HIV fields. He has been involved with the discovery and development of nine investigational new drugs, four Phase 3 clinical programs, two new drug applications and two drug approvals. Prior to joining the Foundation, Dr. Yerxa served as president and co-founder of Envisia Therapeutics, a company focused on developing novel ocular sustained delivery therapies for the front and back of the eye. He also has previously held founding and executive positions in several ophthalmology-based R&D organizations, including Liquidia

Technologies, Clearside Biomedical, Parion Sciences and Inspire Pharmaceuticals.

“Opus is entering a pivotal time in its evolution as our first program, OPGx-001 to address mutations in the LCA5 gene, is expected to enter the clinic this year, bringing a potential treatment another step closer to patients in need,” said Jean Bennett, M.D., Ph.D., Opus scientific founder, board director and scientific advisory board member. “As a founder of the RD Fund and Opus, Ben is uniquely well-suited to realize Opus’ potential to tackle some of the most neglected forms of inherited blindness and make a real difference in the lives of patients.”

Dr. Yerxa holds 60 U.S. patents and is an inventor of DIQUAS™, an innovative treatment for dry eye approved in Japan. Dr. Yerxa earned his Ph.D. in organic chemistry from University of California, Irvine, and BA in chemistry from the University of California, San Diego.

About Opus Genetics
Opus Genetics is a groundbreaking gene therapy company for inherited retinal diseases with a unique model and purpose. Backed by Foundation Fighting Blindness’s venture arm, the RD Fund, Opus combines unparalleled insight and commitment to patient need with wholly owned programs in numerous orphan retinal diseases. Its AAV-based gene therapy portfolio tackles some of the most neglected forms of inherited blindness while creating novel orphan manufacturing scale and efficiencies. Based in Research Triangle Park, N.C., the company leverages knowledge of the best science and the expertise of pioneers in ocular gene therapy to transparently drive transformative treatments to patients. For more information, visit www.opusgenetics.com.

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