

## Ocular Nutritional Products for Age-Related Macular Degeneration

Macular Health is a Birmingham-based company offering nutritional products that help slow vision loss for those suffering with Age-Related Macular Degeneration.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine

**CEOCFO: Mr. McAnnally, what was the concept when you started MACULAR HEALTH?**

**Mr. McAnnally:** We initially started the company with the concept of providing ocular nutrition to patients in a better model than what existed or currently available; such as putting the numerous pills that people had to take every day for their ocular nutrition source, into one pill per day. That was where we started. Then we looked at the science and tried to improve on the science, too. That is what led us to where we are now.

**CEOCFO: Is there general acceptance of how to treat or the need for ocular health and preventative care? Would you give us the basics of the industry and the medical thought?**

**Mr. McAnnally:** Macular degeneration, as you know, is the leading cause of blindness in the United States. It is also the leading cause of severe depression and suicide. The largest studies that were done in ophthalmology, known as the AREDS and the AREDS2, which stands for Age Related Eye Disease Study and part 2 of it, were the largest studies ever done. They proved that a certain group of nutrients slowed the

progression of this non curable eye disease by up to twenty five percent. We further improved upon that by adding a couple of key ingredients that they recently tested and added to their AREDS2 protocol which we have been using for ten years. I think the need for nutrition is huge for this devastating eye disease. It is one of the most important things that can slow down the progression. There are two forms of this eye disease; a Wet and a Dry form. The dry form makes up ninety percent of those that suffer from Macular Degeneration, whereas the other ten percent with the Wet form is the more treatable type, but by injection. However, the wet form is the more devastating type. You can go from dry to wet overnight. Once you go wet you are always considered wet. That simply means that you have developed leaky blood vessels that leak clear fluid or blood in the back which causes scarring. As you know, we cannot do anything about scarring.

**CEOCFO: Would you tell us about Macular Health™?**

**Mr. McAnnally:** We are a Birmingham-based company that was founded in 2003. We are going onto our eleventh year, this year. We have been fortunate enough to really make a huge difference throughout the country and have recently expanded internationally and will soon be available in Europe, South Africa and Canada. Both myself, and in my opinion one of the world's best retina surgeons, founded this company together. We really focus on providing products that are built in an FDA-inspected GMP, Good Manufacturing Practices, compliant facility. We adhere to rigorous testing to insure patients get top quality products. From a nutraceutical standpoint, you do not necessarily know what you are getting or taking for sure in today's nutraceuticals. Just because you buy it from a loyal brand does not necessarily mean that it has any actives in it since testing is not a must in this industry. Therefore, we go a step further and test random batches to insure that we are providing top quality products for the patients that trust us with their vision.

**CEOCFO: What is in your products that might not be in others, so that they may have a little bit different formulation to make it more effective?**

**Mr. McAnnally:** I think that we all have had very similar formulas for several years. I think that this alone is what sets us apart now, more than ever. Most nutraceutical companies have about the same product line, give or take a couple of milligrams here or there. Now this is where we set ourselves apart from other nutraceutical companies. You can only change the formula so many different ways and claim "mine is better than yours" from a marketing perspective. What we wanted to focus on is the delivery method. The delivery method is what is crucial in today's market. With vitamins; according to the PDR, which is the Physicians' Desk Reference, pointing out that many times hard tablets only offer 10 percent absorption. Soft gels or capsules were around 25 percent absorption. We wanted to see how we could get better penetration of the actives and get a better absorption rate, which would clearly set us apart from every other nutraceutical.



Jeffery McAnnally - CEO

That is what led us to develop MacuStrip™, our new patented technology that we will soon be releasing. We deliver it on an oral thin film, similar to a Listerine® Breath Strip. We put the medicine or the vitamins on the strip by encapsulating the ingredients and using special technology that enables us to improve the delivery method. We then deliver it on the tongue or cheek of the mouth thus eliminating the need to swallow pills. This alleviates a lot of patients' issues with not being able to swallow. Often times, by using a strip rather than a pill will eliminate stomach irritation caused by many nutraceuticals. That is clearly what sets us apart and clearly changes the game from a nutraceutical standpoint.

**CEOCFO: *Is the public receptive to that method?***

**Mr. McAnnally:** Absolutely! We have been at conferences the past few weeks with doctors. Many eye doctors at each conference have visited our both saying, and I quote, "This is a game changer for the eye industry." The public is thrilled. The public members that we have spoken with so far; say they are extremely excited about the chance of not having to swallow a pill. They are even more excited about having a better opportunity to save the vision that they are losing. I think that that is a huge deal. Having just listened to doctors at these two different conferences that we just got back from, one of them felt that this was the best thing he had seen in eye care in a number of years. Many of the leading eye doctors that have had an opportunity to see the new MacuStrip™ were saying the very same thing. That is because many patients clearly cannot swallow pills and the compliance ration goes down significantly. In the original AREDS study patients only took seventy five percent of the assigned medications during the actual study. That meant they took three of the four pills they were supposed to take therefore, compliance with pills is very poor. The ability to give it to them and deliver it in the mouth in just a few seconds makes all the difference in the world.

**"It is our mission to offer patients the best chance of holding on the most important thing they have in their lives, which is their eyesight. I think you can live without arms, legs, fingers and toes, but I do not think you have much quality of life if you cannot see. I think that is the most precious gift that we have and I think that is what our company values the most for its customers." - Jeffery McAnnally**

**CEOCFO: *What is the key to rolling out this product without giving the impression that your standard product is not good? What is the strategy?***

**Mr. McAnnally:** Since we were built at one of the top research hospitals in the country at the University of Alabama, Birmingham, Callahan Eye Foundation Hospital, by Dr. John O. Mason, III, M.D., we have testing technology that not all nutraceutical companies have at their disposal. We will do extensive testing such as serum level testing and we will compare what gets into the blood by taking a pill and what actually gets into the blood using the MacuStrip™. We will be able to show, without a shadow of doubt, just how much of each active is actually entering the bloodstream which could in turn offer a much better chance of holding on to your vision. We are going to do it from a scientific standpoint and show medically how it is much better than taking a pill. We will also do what is called a multi-focal electroretinogram, or MERG study for short, to compare to our original study that we did on pills in 2006. We can compare that study to what we get from our MacuStrip™, which I suspect will be significantly better. We will have a lot of medical data that clearly identifies the difference in why this is more than "snake oil." It is something that can truly make in impact on everyone's life.

**CEOCFO: *What was the challenge scientifically in making the MacuStrip? What did you need to overcome?***

**Mr. McAnnally:** One of the biggest hurdles, with the MacuStrip™, was how to get all of the dosage we need on a strip. We had to use what is called crystalline which are the highest concentrations of each nutrient that we put in the product. Getting that is not always easy, because many of these things are patented and people do not want to give up their technology for the strip. However, this technology is so big it first looked like a "slow go", but now I have more corporate executives and presidents of these companies that make these specific patented nutrients asking me, "What do we have to do to get in the MacuStrip™? We will give you the crystalline to put it in the MacuStrip™. We think this is going to be a life changing product and we are willing to roll the dice and share our technology with you to allow us to be part of this new technology. There have been many hurdles to overcome. We have a great team of scientists, doctors and chemists that have extensive years in this industry that have helped us navigate through the many challenges we have faced. It took us about a year and a half of going back and forth to the drawing board, to find the exact formula and the exact method that would fit on a strip. That is because strips are limited by milligrams, so we had to find just the right one that made it. We did not technically have that until just recently. That is because strip technology is advancing at a record pace and we are at the top of the chain with that pace. However, it was an evolving process that we are fortunate enough to be a part of. We came in on the tail end of it and were able, at the last minute, to find a way to get it on the strip. That is where we are now.

**CEOCFO: *What is the timetable? Would you lay out the next year or two?***

**Mr. McAnnally:** In the next year or two, we are going to take it direct to the consumer. We are going to go straight to the consumer market. I think that we are going to really ramp up how we introduce this to patients that suffer with AMD and

also those patients that have strong family histories with AMD. While there are not studies that say that someone that does not have AMD can benefit from a nutraceutical product, there are certainly no studies that say they won't either. We are of the mindset that we are going to push forward on those patients that are over age 45 that have strong family histories of AMD and many of the risk factors for AMD. We are going to dispense it that way, directly to them, too. That is because this will be a huge benefactor when it comes to keeping their vision safe also. The other thing that we will do is prepare for the Baby Boomers maturing and coming into this AMD market. That is the largest audience and richest audience in the world that will be forced to deal with this devastating eye disease head on, which no doubt will be an epidemic at that point. Therefore, we are going to do an extensive marketing campaign to reach out to them, through television, radio, social media and web. This is how it is and this is the science behind it. That is us going forward. We will really establish a trend for patients and establish a brand that they can trust.

**CEOCFO: *Why should people pay attention to MACULAR HEALTH and to Visual Advantage today?***

**Mr. McAnnally:** They should pay attention because we are clearly different. We are a company that is not just about making supplements. We are a company that is focused on delivery technology, and delivery technology is critical in today's market. We are also and most importantly focused on developing the best treatments to help save the most precious gift they have – their sight. Many septic tank companies; when they pump septic tanks, they pump a foot of vitamins out of your septic tanks. That is because the dissolution times with vitamins are a huge issue. Therefore, I think our company is making waves in the marketplace, simply based on the fact that we are an American-made product and keenly focused on making a better product and not just another vitamin. I think that clearly makes us worth listening to and paying attention to. The key things about our company is that our cost is one of the most affordable in the vitamin industry and while our focus is on the delivery technology to make sure that we are not one of those companies that end up in the septic tank. It is our mission to offer patients the best chance of holding on the most important thing they have in their lives, which is their eyesight. I think you can live without arms, legs, fingers and toes, but I do not think you have much quality of life if you cannot see. I think that is the most precious gift that we have and I think that is what our company values the most for its customers. We have a strong feeling for our customers and the resources to continue to find new ways to help save their vision. I think that is what clearly makes us worth paying attention to.

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**BIO:** President and CEO Jeffery McAnnally helped to develop Macular Health in 2003, with the help of a retina specialist who has a family history of Age-Related Macular Degeneration. Today, Macular Health's products are sold throughout the World and the company is a leader in the ophthalmic nutraceutical industry. Macular Health recognizes the importance of nutrition and focuses on building more affordable eye supplements for the customer which is the most important part of who we are and what we do. All of our supplements are based on the latest scientific research and built in an FDA-inspected facility to insure every patient receives the best products possible. It is very important to know who you are dealing with when it comes to which supplements you are taking and where they are manufactured.

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