



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Melanoma Research Alliance Applauds Today's FDA Approval of Breakthrough  
New Treatment for Fighting Melanoma**  
*Vemurafenib Approval Is Encouraging, Although More Work Remains*

WASHINGTON, August 17, 2011 – The Melanoma Research Alliance (MRA), the largest private funder of melanoma research, hailed today's approval by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of vemurafenib (Zelboraf) as a crucial advance for patients in the fight against melanoma, the deadliest of skin cancers.

"The FDA's approval today for Roche's vemurafenib is welcome news for patients and those at risk of advanced melanoma and represents a breakthrough accomplishment in targeting a therapy to a specific group of patients who can benefit," said Wendy K.D. Selig, president and chief executive officer of MRA. "We know, however, that much still remains to be done to expand effective options for all those who suffer from this devastating diagnosis and to find cures, and that's why MRA is redoubling our efforts to find and fund the most exciting research that can build upon this latest success."

Vemurafenib is designed as an inhibitor of a mutated form of the BRAF protein, one that is found in about half of all cases of melanoma. This type of selective targeting of a mutated protein responsible for tumor growth has shown dramatic results.

"At MRA we are actively engaged in building upon the success of BRAF inhibition, having to date invested \$6 million in research aimed specifically at identifying resistance mechanisms and testing combinations with BRAF inhibitors and other agents," said Suzanne Topalian, M.D., chief science officer. "As one example, we are funding a multidisciplinary investigative team involving several institutions across the country. Working together, these scientists and clinicians are sharing biopsy specimens and their considerable expertise to systematically address the critical challenge of overcoming resistance to selective BRAF inhibition that eventually develops in many treated patients."

While the entire melanoma community applauds the breakthrough exemplified by vemurafenib, the data demonstrate that tumors have the ability to develop resistance to the drug, causing patients to relapse. Additionally, because some patients with BRAF mutation do not respond to the drug and about half of patients do not have the mutation, finding additional new targets remains an ongoing urgent need. MRA is driving the research agenda for the development of new targets for therapies. MRA's next Request for Proposals, to be released at the end of August, will outline some of these areas of high priority for additional investment.

"The many investigative research projects that we are supporting will hopefully lead to the discovery of other promising therapies that will more broadly attack this

highly aggressive and too often fatal disease,” said Debra Black, co-founder and chair. “We are dedicated to accelerating the pace of scientific discovery so that no one will suffer or die from melanoma.”

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***About the Melanoma Research Alliance***

*The Melanoma Research Alliance is a public charity formed in 2007 under the auspices of the Milken Institute, with the generous founding support of Debra and Leon Black. It supports an international, cross-disciplinary group of biomedical researchers possessing clinical and scientific expertise to explore, identify and pursue innovative solutions to critical research questions, leading to better treatments and a cure for melanoma patients. For more information, visit [www.curemelanoma.org](http://www.curemelanoma.org) or contact:*

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