



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Melanoma Research Alliance Welcomes Approval of Ipilimumab to Treat Melanoma

FDA Approval of First Drug for Treating Metastatic Melanoma in 13 Years Is Important Sign of Progress, but More Needs to be Accomplished

WASHINGTON, March 25, 2011 – The Melanoma Research Alliance (MRA), which is dedicated to accelerating progress toward a cure for melanoma, today said that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s decision to approve ipilimumab for treatment of metastatic melanoma was welcome news. This approval underscores progress that is being made, but that the battle to find treatment and cures for melanoma, one of the fastest-growing cancers, has yet to be won.

Ipilimumab, which will be sold by Bristol-Myers Squibb as Yervoy, is the first drug approved for metastatic melanoma in 13 years and is the first drug ever to demonstrate improvement in overall survival for this disease.

“This is an exciting breakthrough for the field of melanoma. Previously, patients with metastatic melanoma had few effective treatment options,” said Suzanne Topalian, M.D., chief science officer. “The median survival for patients with Stage IV melanoma remains less than one year, and thus new therapies like ipilimumab are urgently needed.”

Ipilimumab (or anti-CTLA-4) is an immunotherapy that works by stimulating the body’s immune system to more effectively attack cancer cells. In a Phase III clinical trial published in June, patients with Stage III or IV metastatic melanoma who had failed a prior therapy who were treated with ipilimumab lived four months longer on average than patients in the control group (10 months vs. 6 months), and 20 percent of treated patients were living two years later. Significant side effects occurred in 10-15 percent of patients, but most were managed with prompt medical attention.

The importance of CTLA-4 in cancer therapy was discovered and clinically developed by researchers at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, a team that includes James Allison, Ph.D., and Jedd Wolchok, M.D., Ph.D. Both investigators are engaged in an MRA-sponsored project to explore new therapeutic combinations with this drug, as well as a project jointly funded by MRA and the Cancer Research Institute to improve upon this approach by identifying those patients who could benefit most from ipilimumab. In addition, MRA is funding researchers at other medical centers to study additional biomarkers of drug response and to combine ipilimumab with other agents, specifically kinase inhibitors and bevacizumab.

“MRA and our funded researchers are working to accelerate the pace of research to further improve ipilimumab and speed the development of other promising immunotherapeutic approaches,” said Debra Black, founder and chair.

In addition to supporting research on immunotherapies, the MRA's \$22 million research program includes developing molecularly targeted therapies and combination therapies as well as better prevention, diagnostic and staging approaches. MRA, the largest private funder of melanoma research, has awarded grants to 50 research programs in eight countries. MRA will announce its latest round of funding, for individual investigator awards, in the next two weeks.

"These immunotherapeutic advances give hope to people suffering from metastatic melanoma," said Wendy K.D. Selig, president and CEO. "We are encouraged to continue our efforts to find effective treatments and ultimately a cure for this deadly disease."

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About the Melanoma Research Alliance

The Melanoma Research Alliance is a public charity formed 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 issues leading to better treatments and a cure for patients with melanoma. Since its founding in 2007, MRA has become the largest private funder of melanoma. For more information, visit www.melanomaresearchalliance.org.

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