



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Melanoma Research Alliance Awards \$5.6 Million in Research Grants
Since 2007, MRA has funded more than \$30 million worldwide to find a cure and effective treatments for melanoma

WASHINGTON, July 12, 2011 – The Melanoma Research Alliance (MRA), the largest private funder of research to find treatments and a cure for this deadly skin cancer, today announced new research awards of \$5.6 million. This brings the total that MRA has awarded in its first four years of grant-making to more than \$30 million.

The awards announced today will fund wide-ranging projects including developing novel diagnostic and prognostic systems, discovering new drug targets and testing combination therapies. The award categories include Team Science Awards, which bring together researchers within and across institutions and scientific sectors, Established Investigator Awards and Academic-Industry Partnerships.

“There is so much excitement in the melanoma field as a result of recent, highly promising developments for treating advanced disease. Our goal is to accelerate that progress, moving from what has been called ‘the year of melanoma’ to ‘the year of the melanoma *cure*’ as quickly as possible,” said Wendy K.D. Selig, president and CEO of MRA.

In keeping with the MRA’s global approach of reaching out to the best and brightest of melanoma researchers, the current round of awards will be led by scientists in Canada and the Netherlands, as well as the United States. To date, MRA support has seeded 73 projects led by 114 principal investigators at 55 institutions in nine countries.

“We saw real creativity and determination from the field with this round of proposals,” said Debra Black, co-founder and chair of MRA. “The scientists and clinicians know that recent success is only part of the answer, and they are committed to understanding more about how to better prevent, detect and treat this terrible disease. Building on their success, we feel the urgency as melanoma cases have tripled in the United States over the past 30 years while the death rate has remained static.”

MRA is awarding five 2011 Team Science Awards, which support multidisciplinary teams to pursue transformational advances in melanoma research, to:

- Jeffrey Gershenwald, MD, Victor Prieto, MD, PhD and Michael Davies, MD, PhD, all of the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, for work to establish molecular prognostic markers for early stage disease, to improve melanoma staging over the current clinicopathologic system.
- Gregory Hannon, PhD, and Christopher Hammell, PhD, both of Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, for a project to discover new drug targets for patients without BRAF mutation, exploring RNA expression, epigenetics and preclinical validation.
- Craig Sligluff, MD, The University of Virginia, and Jade Homsy, MD, the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, for a Phase 1/2 trial testing long peptide vaccines and TLR agonists, a promising new vaccine approach that has not yet been tested in melanoma patients.

- Alan Spatz, MD, Jewish General Hospital/Lady Davis Institute for Medical Research; Teresa Petrella, MD, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre; Joos van den Oord, MD, PhD, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven; Leon Van Kempen, PhD, McGill University; and Boris Bastian, MD, PhD, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, for studying X chromosome genes as potential prognostic biomarkers and therapeutic targets, building on the observation that women with melanoma have a better prognosis than men.
- Leonard Zon, MD, Children's Hospital Boston, and Keith Flaherty, MD, Massachusetts General Hospital, for an innovative Phase 2 trial testing the combination of BRAF inhibition and leflunomide (an approved arthritis drug) to target molecular and cellular fate pathways and overcome resistance to single agent use of selective BRAF inhibitors.

This year's latest round of awardees also includes the first recipients of the MRA Established Investigator Academic-Industry Partnership Awards: Timothy Bullock, PhD, The University of Virginia, and Allan Halpern, MD, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center. These awards are designed to facilitate interactions between the academic and industrial research sectors, and will be co-funded by MRA and an industrial collaborator whose involvement is essential to the project. Bullock's study investigates mechanisms of antitumor immunity in a Phase 1 trial of an anti-CD27 agonist monoclonal antibody. Halpern is focused on developing a 3-D skin imaging system to accelerate early diagnostics.

MRA also announced two additional awards. Douglas Tyler, MD, of Duke University, received an Established Investor Award, to study the effects of regional therapy for in-transit melanoma on tumor molecular characteristics and immune system responses.

Additionally, as a result of an anonymous donation, Drew Pardoll, MD, PhD, and Suzanne Topalian, MD, both from Johns Hopkins University (Topalian is also chief science officer of MRA), received a two-year expansion for their 2009 Team Science Award with Lieping Chen, MD, PhD, from Yale University, which explores combination therapies using a vaccine and immune checkpoint blockade.

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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 initial 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.

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