

Melanoma Research Alliance

Promising Data for Melanoma Reported at ASCO Meeting; MRA-Funded Studies Take Center Stage in Fight against Deadly Skin Cancer

CHICAGO, IL, June 04, 2012 – For the third year in a row, major advances in melanoma research headlined the 2012 Annual Meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO), in Chicago June 1-5. Positive results from Phase-1 clinical trials of experimental drugs aimed at restoring the immune system’s ability to spot and attack melanoma, and data on innovative combinatorial strategies for targeted therapies – approaches that have benefited from millions of dollars of funding from the Melanoma Research Alliance (MRA) -- are among the highlights of this year’s meeting.

“It is exciting to see how much progress is being made in the fight against melanoma, a deadly skin cancer that, until recently, had seen very little improvement for patients with advanced disease,” said Wendy K.D. Selig, MRA President and CEO. “This is the third year in which significant advances in melanoma research and clinical trials are headlining the ASCO meeting, causing unprecedented optimism and momentum among clinicians and patients.”

MRA funding is playing a central role in advancing these and other transformational melanoma advances. Since its founding in 2007, MRA has awarded more than \$38 million to 97 projects in 10 countries. Approximately 20 of MRA’s funded investigators presented findings or leading sessions at this year’s ASCO meeting.

Among the key findings presented were the results of early phase clinical trials and related research data led by scientists from the Johns Hopkins Kimmel Cancer Center and multiple other U.S. sites on a new immune checkpoint inhibitor called anti-PD-1. Results from clinical testing of this agent were presented by Dr. Suzanne Topalian, professor of surgery and oncology at the Kimmell Cancer Center and MRA’s Chief Science Officer. The findings are reported online in the [New England Journal of Medicine](#). MRA is providing research support through a \$2 million Team Science Award to further elucidate the mechanisms underlying this therapy, identify treatment-related biomarkers and develop combinatorial therapy approaches. MRA has invested \$6.7 million in a variety of studies on immune checkpoint inhibition, a treatment approach whose clinical utility was established with the FDA-approval of ipilimumab last year.

In the Phase 1 trial, the PD-1 blocking drug produced positive results in melanoma, non-small cell lung cancer and kidney cancer patients. As part of the work funded by MRA, the investigators found that PD-

L1 (the partner protein to PD-1) expression in patient tumor samples was correlated with treatment response.

“These results are extremely encouraging for melanoma patients and they underscore the importance of MRA’s funding in accelerating the pace of discovery. By identifying and supporting the studies to understand mechanisms of action for immune therapies, MRA’s funding has been critical to this progress,” Selig said. “Finding and funding the most impactful translational research and leveraging collaborations among stakeholders are at the heart of MRA’s mission.”

Research into other treatments for metastatic melanoma was also featured at the ASCO meeting. Among those were results from a Phase 1/2 trial of combined BRAF and MEK inhibition and as well as single agent drugs targeting this pathway, which is implicated in about half of melanomas. MRA has invested almost \$7.5 million in research funding to investigators focused on understanding mechanisms of drug resistance and combining BRAF inhibitors with other therapies.

###

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 or contact:

CONTACT: Angelo Bouselli
Melanoma Research Alliance
202.336.8922
abouselli@curemelanoma.org

Anreder & Company
212.532.3232
Steven S. Anreder
steven.anreder@anreder.com
Cristina Bacon
cristina.bacon@anreder.com