Melanoma Research Alliance Announces $11.8 Million in 28 New Grants to Advance Melanoma Research

Over $100 Million in MRA Grants Now Awarded Since MRA’s Inception

WASHINGTON, DC, April 24, 2018 – On the cusp of Melanoma Awareness Month, the Melanoma Research Alliance (MRA), the largest non-profit funder of melanoma research, announced funding for 28 research grants totaling $11,800,000. These awards will fund researchers at 23 institutions from across the United States, Australia and Belgium to accelerate research and advance the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of the most deadly form of skin cancer and the fifth most common cancer in the United States.

This year’s grant awards will support 13 Team Science Awards and 15 Young Investigator Awards. Together, these awards represent the single largest grant year ever by the Melanoma Research Alliance and brings the total invested by the organization to over $100 million.

“We have made incredible progress in the fight against melanoma,” said Debra Black cofounder and chair. “But melanoma continues to be the most deadly form of skin cancer with 9,500 deaths and 91,000 Americans diagnosed this year. More work is needed to fully eliminate suffering and death due to this disease.”

These 28 research projects will accelerate research addressing critical issues in melanoma, including identifying novel drug targets, treatments and biomarkers, as well as studies aimed at preventing melanoma or improving methods of early detection. Several research projects will provide critical advancements in the understanding of rare and difficult-to-treat melanoma subtypes. Six awards will examine new therapeutic interventions to determine how specific genetic alterations contribute to the development and progression to acral lentiginous melanoma.

“The scientific proposals reviewed and then selected by our expert Grant Review Committee this year were exceptional,” said MRA Chief Science Officer, Louise M. Perkins, PhD. “These awards build on our current understanding of melanoma prevention, diagnosis and treatment. Importantly, they also support the next generation of melanoma researchers, and provide critical support for translational and early-stage clinical research needed to cure this disease.”
“These grants will help advance better outcomes for melanoma patients by accelerating research into novel prevention and treatment strategies,” said MRA President & CEO Michael Kaplan. “We are thrilled to have such broad support from industry, academic institutions, and our many donors who have made a commitment to join forces against this disease.”

MRA’s 2018 grants are made possible through the significant contributions of individuals, families, institutions and corporate allies. Donors and partners providing financial support for 75% or more of an award, are listed below within the award naming.

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**About Melanoma**

Most melanomas originate from the skin, though they can also arise from other parts of the body containing melanocytes, including the eyes, brain or spinal cord, or mucous membranes. Melanoma of the skin is one of the most common cancers in the United States and its incidence has tripled in the last 30 years. It is the most common cancer diagnosis in young adults 25–29 years old and the second most common cancer in young people 15–29 years old. Melanoma is the deadliest of all skin cancers.

**About Melanoma Research Alliance (MRA)**

Founded in 2007 under the auspices of the Milken Institute, with the generous support of Debra and Leon Black, the Melanoma Research Alliance exists to accelerate treatment options and find a cure for melanoma. As the largest nonprofit funder of melanoma research, it has dedicated $100 million and leveraged more than $90 million in addition towards its mission. Through its support, MRA has championed revolutions in immunotherapy, targeted therapies, novel combinations and diagnostics. Due to the ongoing support of its founders, 100 percent of donations to MRA go directly to its melanoma research program. MRA’s ability to fund wide-ranging research in melanoma is amplified by unique collaborations and partnerships with individuals, private foundations, and corporations. Visit [http://www.CureMelanoma.org](http://www.CureMelanoma.org) for more information.

**2018 Awards**

**Team Science Awards**

**Targeting BAP1-dependent alterations in metastatic uveal melanoma**

*The Helman Family-MRA Team Science Award, 2018-2021*

Andrew Aplin, Thomas Jefferson University
Emily Bernstein, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai
J. William Harbour, Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center/University of Miami Health Systems
Young Investigator: Marlana Orloff, Thomas Jefferson University

**Diet, mental health, and the microbiome in response to immunotherapy**

*MRA Team Science Award, collaboratively funded by University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, 2018-2021*

Lorenzo Cohen, University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center
Jennifer Wargo, University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center
Young Investigator: Jennifer McQuade, University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center
Autophagy in the tumor microenvironment as a target for drug development
The Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Foundation-MRA Team Science Award, 2018-2021
Hilary Coller, University of California, Los Angeles
Beatrice Knudsen, Cedars-Sinai Medical Center
Lili Yang, University of California, Los Angeles
Young Investigator: Claudio Scafoglio, University of California, Los Angeles

Telomere crisis in acral melanoma: Diagnostic and prognostic potentials
The Black Family-MRA Team Science Award, 2018-2021
Titia de Lange, The Rockefeller University
Marcin Imieliński, Joan & Sanford I. Weill Medical College of Cornell University
Young Investigator: John Maciejowski, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

Commensal microbiota and anti-PD-1 efficacy
MRA Team Science Award, collaboratively funded by The University of Chicago, 2018-2021
Thomas Gajewski, The University of Chicago
Jason Luke, The University of Chicago
Cathryn Nagler, The University of Chicago
Young Investigator: Riyue Bao, The University of Chicago

Patient focused therapy for acral melanoma
The Sokoloff Family-MRA Team Science Award, with collaborative funding from Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, 2018-2021
Ruth Halaban, Yale University
Charlotte Ariyan, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center
Alfred Bothwell, Yale University
Jian Cao, Yale University
Neal Rosen, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center
Richard White, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center
Jedd Wolchok, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center
Qin Yan, Yale University
Young Investigator: Gauri Panse, Yale University

Identifying genetic dependencies in rare forms of melanoma
MRA Team Science Award, 2018-2021
Nicholas Hayward, Queensland Institute of Medical Research
Francisca Vazquez, Broad Institute
Young Investigator: Ken Dutton-Regester, Queensland Institute of Medical Research

Prognostic and functional role of altered circular RNAs in melanoma
Leveraged Finance Fights Melanoma-MRA Team Science Award, 2018-2021
Eva Hernando, New York University School of Medicine
Ernesto Guccione, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai
Edward and Julie Minskoff – Young Investigator: Melissa Wilson, New York University School of Medicine

Next-generation neoantigen-targeting peptide vaccines for melanoma patients
BJ’s Wholesale Club-MRA Team Science Award, 2018-2021
Patrick Ott, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute
Bradley Pentelute, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Catherine Wu, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute
Young Investigator: Osama Rahma, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute

**Regulating telomerase & telomere homeostasis in acral melanoma development**
*MRA Team Science Award, collaboratively funded by the research institutions, 2018-2021*

Gavin Robertson, The Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine
Jiyue Zhu, Washington State University
Young Investigator: De Cheng, Washington State University
Young Investigator: Shobhan Gaddameedhi, Washington State University
Young Investigator: Raghavendra Gowda, The Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine

**Defining and targeting driver events in acral melanoma**
*U.S. Trust-MRA Team Science Award, 2018-2021*

Keiran Smalley, H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute
Yian Chen, H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute
John Koomen, H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute
Jane Messina, H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute
Jamie Teer, H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute
Young Investigator, Florian Karreth, H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute

**Directing adaptive immune responses to non-polymorphic MHCs in melanoma**
*MRA Team Science Award, collaboratively funded by Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2018-2021*

Forest White, Massachusetts Institute of Technology-Koch Institute for Integrative Cancer Research
Dane Wittrup, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Young Investigator: Michael Birnbaum, Massachusetts Institute of Technology-Koch Institute for Integrative Cancer Research
Young Investigator: Stefani Spranger, Massachusetts Institute of Technology-Koch Institute for Integrative Cancer Research

**DAMPening immunotherapy adverse events in melanoma**
*MRA Team Science Award, collaboratively funded by the research institutions, 2018-2021*

Pan Zheng, University of Maryland, Baltimore
Yang Liu, University of Maryland, Baltimore
Young Investigator: Siwen Hu-Lieskovan, The University of California, Los Angeles

**Young Investigator Awards**

**Molecular and immune profiling of acral melanoma from various ethnicities**
*MRA Young Investigator Award, collaboratively funded by University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, 2018-2021*

Phyu Aung, University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center

**Building a predictive framework for vaccine design against melanoma**
*Elliott and Ruth Sigal-MRA Young Investigator Award, 2018-2021*

Nicolas Chevrier, The University of Chicago
Manipulating cellular metabolism to promote cancer immunity in melanoma
The Robbins Family-MRA Young Investigator Award, 2018-2021
Ku-Lung Hsu, The University of Virginia

Investigating the mechanistic basis for tumor immunogenicity in melanoma
The Sokoloff Family-MRA Young Investigator Award, 2018-2021
Nikhil Joshi, Yale University

LncRNAs as modulators of protein synthesis rewiring in melanoma
Amanda and Jonathan Eilian-MRA Young Investigator Award, 2018-2021
Eleonora Leucci, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

Primary anogenital melanoma: Comprehensive molecular and immune analysis
MRA Young Investigator Award, collaboratively funded by University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, 2018-2021
Priyadharsini Nagarajan, University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center

Isoform-specific targeting of the PI3Ks to overcome cancer immunoresistance
MRA Young Investigator Award, collaboratively funded by University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, 2018-2021
Weiyi Peng, University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center

Dependence of melanoma metastasis on AMPK-mediated metabolic switch
Ellen and Gary Davis Foundation-MRA Young Investigator Award, collaboratively funded by Joan & Sanford I. Weill Medical College of Cornell University, 2018-2021
Elena Piskounova, Joan & Sanford I. Weill Medical College of Cornell University

The genomic landscape of individual melanocytes from human skin
Tara Miller Melanoma Foundation-MRA Young Investigator Award, 2018-2021
A. Hunter Shain, The University of California, San Francisco

A novel approach for NF1 mutant melanoma sub-classification
MRA Young Investigator Award, 2018-2021
Edward Stites, The Salk Institute for Biological Studies

Targeting PSGL-1 inhibitory pathways to promote anti-tumor T cell immunity
The Denise and Michael Kellen Foundation-MRA Young Investigator Award, 2018-2021
Roberto Tinoco, Sanford Burnham Prebys Medical Discovery Institute

Pilot study of intervention to reduce sunburns in melanoma survivors
The Wayne Stinchcomb Big Orange Foundation-MRA Young Investigator Award for Women in Scientific Research, 2018-2021
Rachel Vogel, The University of Minnesota – Twin Cities

Targeting the JNK-ITCH signaling pathway in melanoma
Mary Jo and Brian Rogers-MRA Young Investigator Award, 2018-2021
Lixin Wan, H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute
Developing advanced non-invasive histology techniques
Brownstein, Hyatt, Farber & Schreck-MRA Young Investigator Award, 2018-2021
Jesse Wilson, Colorado State University

Targeting BRAF/NRAS wildtype melanoma with ERBB3 and MEK Inhibition
Julie and Edward J. Minskoff-MRA Young Investigator Award, collaboratively funded by New York University School of Medicine, 2018-2021
Melissa Wilson, New York University School of Medicine