

# Melanoma

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## Research Alliance

### MRA APPLAUDS LATEST MELANOMA DRUG APPROVAL AS “MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH”

**WASHINGTON, D.C., September 4, 2014** – The Melanoma Research Alliance (MRA) today welcomed as a major breakthrough the news that the U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) has granted approval to Merck’s new immunotherapy drug, Keytruda® (pembrolizumab), for treating metastatic melanoma. It is the first anti-PD-1 drug, aimed at re-energizing a patient’s protective immune response to cancer, to have earned FDA approval in the U.S.

“This is the latest in a string of major breakthroughs in melanoma treatment that will galvanize the field of melanoma research and cancer treatment. Pembrolizumab has demonstrated real potential to save the lives of late-stage melanoma patients who had little hope of survival just a few years ago,” said **Wendy Selig, MRA President and CEO**. “Though we have much work left to do we are committed to funding breakthrough research to speed the delivery of cures to all melanoma patients.”

Immunotherapy treatments are uniquely positioned to change the way we treat cancer by harnessing the power of the body’s immune system. With an outstanding 69% of melanoma patients treated with pembrolizumab alive at one year, the future of melanoma treatment has never looked more promising, said Ms. Selig. She noted that MRA has invested one-third of total funding toward scientific studies of immunotherapies and plans to continue to support the critical work needed to provide patients with the most effective treatments.

“This is an exciting breakthrough for the field of melanoma, one that has been accelerated as a result of MRA’s leadership in funding transformative research,” added **Suzanne Topalian, M.D., MRA board member and Scientific Advisory Chair, and herself a pioneer in studying immunotherapies**. “Without MRA’s support, critical studies evaluating the effectiveness and mechanism of action of immunotherapies like anti-PD-1 would not have moved forward. We are in an amazing time of discovery and progress for melanoma patients as a result of these breakthroughs.”

“The news of FDA’s first approval of an anti-PD-1 drug is extremely exciting and shows just how far the field has come in the last few years,” said **Debra Black, MRA Co-Founder and Chair of the Board**. “When we started MRA there was little hope for melanoma patients. Today we are seeing a real sea change, with several new therapies and proof of concept that these new treatments can save lives.”

Since MRA’s launch in 2007, seven new therapies have been approved for the treatment of melanoma, drastically changing the outlook for patients. Melanoma research has energized the entire field of oncology, charting a new course in cancer treatment. Clinical studies of immunotherapies have already shown promising results in other forms of cancer such as bladder, blood and lung cancers, and the potential benefits of immunotherapies have yet to be fully realized.

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## **About the Melanoma Research Alliance**

MRA is a public charity formed in 2007 under the auspices of the Milken Institute, with the generous founding support of Debra and Leon Black. MRA has dedicated more than \$60 million to research seeking to better prevent, diagnose, and treat melanoma, the most deadly type of skin cancer. Due to the ongoing support of its founders, 100% of every dollar MRA raises goes to support its melanoma research program. The organization is poised to build on recent momentum in the field, accelerating the pace of scientific discovery and translation in order to eliminate suffering and death due to melanoma. MRA's ability to fund wide-ranging research in melanoma is amplified by unique multi-faceted collaborations and partnerships with individuals, private foundations, and corporations. For more information, please visit [www.CureMelanoma.org](http://www.CureMelanoma.org).

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