For Immediate Release

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Melanoma Research Alliance Announces $8.2 Million for 33 Grant Awards to Advance Melanoma Research

WASHINGTON, D.C., April 30, 2019 – In advance of Melanoma Awareness Month, the Melanoma Research Alliance (MRA), the largest non-profit funder of melanoma research, today announced funding for 33 innovative research awards totaling $8.26 million.

The newly selected research awards will address critical unmet needs in melanoma detection, prognostication and treatment. Five awards – three of which were generously funded by the Michael and Jacqueline Ferro Family Foundation – will investigate ways to better harness artificial intelligence to improve the early detection and prognosis of melanoma. Several other projects will examine novel drug targets, new treatment approaches for brain metastases, and ways to overcome targeted therapy resistance.

“For so many patients and loved ones who have been affected by melanoma, research is hope,” said Debra Black cofounder and chair of MRA. “While progress is steadily being made, we won’t stop until we have cured melanoma. MRA-funded research is accelerating our progress toward better treatments and ultimately a cure for this disease.”

These new research awards come at a critical time, as rates of melanoma have doubled over the last 30 years. This year in the United States more than 96,000 people will be diagnosed with melanoma and over 7,000 people will succumb to the disease.

While the explosive rate of new melanoma cases is alarming, I am encouraged by the reduced rate of mortality from melanoma. This is a testament to the vast progress we are making in the lab and in the clinic,” said MRA Chief Science Officer, Marc Hurlbert, PhD. “We still have a long way to go, but we are making headway. Additional investment in basic and clinical research is essential to keep the momentum.”

The new awards will support research at 28 institutions in seven countries, comprising 16 Established Investigators, 12 Young Investigators and five Pilot awards. The grants were selected by MRA’s Grant Review Committee through a diligent peer review process and confirmed by the MRA Board of Directors. The awards announced today bring MRA’s total investment in life-saving melanoma research to over $110 million, in addition to $150 million in outside, leveraged funds.
“At MRA, we’ve seen our funded research translate to true real world improvements in the prevention, detection and treatment of melanoma. We have no doubt that these new awards will take us even closer to achieving our goal of ending pain and suffering due to melanoma,” said MRA President & CEO Michael Kaplan.

MRA’s 2019 grant awards 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 named award.

2019 Grant Awards

**Established Investigator Awards**

**Epigenetic Regulation of Resistance to Targeted Therapies in Melanoma**  
*MRA Established Investigator Award*  
Rhoda Alani M.D., Boston University

**Targeting MAPK and PI3K signaling via CK2 inhibition in acral melanoma**  
*MRA Established Investigator Award, collaboratively funded by Columbia University*  
Angela Christiano Ph.D., Columbia University

**Applying AI to Assess Histologic Features to Improve Melanoma Diagnosis**  
*Michael and Jacqueline Ferro Family Foundation - MRA Established Investigator Award for Artificial Intelligence Applied to Melanoma*  
Joann Elmore M.D., M.P.H., University of California Los Angeles

**DGAT1 is a novel melanoma oncogene**  
*MRA Established Investigator Award*  
Adam Hurlstone Ph.D., University of Manchester

**Eradicating melanoma drug-tolerant cells**  
*MRA Established Investigator Award*  
Jean-Christophe Marine Ph.D., VIB

**Enhanced-OCT for discriminating nevi from melanomas**  
*Michael and Jacqueline Ferro Family Foundation - MRA Established Investigator Award for Artificial Intelligence Applied to Melanoma*  
Mohammadreza Nasiriavanaki Ph.D., Wayne State University

**Developing a predictive tool using machine learning algorithm in melanoma**  
*MRA Established Investigator Award, collaboratively funded by New York University School of Medicine*  
Iman Osman M.D., New York University School of Medicine

**Metabolic Control of T cell Senescence for Melanoma Immunotherapy**  
*MRA Established Investigator Award*  
Guangyong Peng M.D., Ph.D., Saint Louis University
Preclinical development of a disrupter of BRAF-containing dimers
MRA Established Investigator Award
Neal Rosen M.D., Ph.D., Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center

Studying the effects of intra-tumor heterogeneity on anti-tumor immunity
MRA Established Investigator Award
Yardena Samuels Ph.D., Weizmann Institute

Nanomedicine targeting melanoma-astrocytes interplay in 3D brain metastases
MRA Established Investigator Award
Ronit Satchi-Fainaro Ph.D., Tel-Aviv University

Targeting CD39 in melanoma
MRA Established Investigator Award
Mark Smyth Ph.D., The Council of the Queensland Institute of Medical Research

Mechanism of EBF3 Tumor Suppression in Melanoma
MRA Established Investigator Award
Hensin Tsao MD, PhD, Massachusetts General Hospital (The General Hospital Corp.)

Proof of practice: melanoma screening using computer vision
MRA Established Investigator Award, collaboratively funded by University of California, San Francisco
Maria Wei M.D., Ph.D., University of California, San Francisco

Understanding and targeting metabolic heterogeneity in melanoma
MRA Established Investigator Award
Bin Zheng Ph.D., Massachusetts General Hospital

Finding Pathways That Drive T-Cells Into Melanoma
MRA Established Investigator Award
Leonard I. Zon M.D., Harvard University

Young Investigator Awards

Identification of metabolic liabilities of melanoma cells
MRA Young Investigator Award
Kivanc Birsoy Ph.D., The Rockefeller University

Discovering unconventional CD8+ T-cell epitopes in metastatic melanoma
Bristol-Myers Squibb - MRA Young Investigator Award in Immunotherapy
Yiwen Chen Ph.D., University of Texas, MD Anderson Cancer Center

Optimization of GITR antibodies for melanoma immunotherapy
MRA Young Investigator Award, collaboratively funded by Weizmann Institute of Science
Rony Dahan Ph.D., Weizmann Institute
Targeting copy number alterations to overcome immune evasion in melanoma
*Julie and Edward J. Minskoff - MRA Young Investigator Award*
Teresa Davoli Ph.D., New York University School of Medicine

Microbial metabolites in immunotherapy of malignant melanoma
*Bristol-Myers Squibb - MRA Young Investigator Award in Immunotherapy*
Simon Heidegger M.D., Klinikum rechts der Isar der Technische Universität München

TANK-Binding Kinase 1 (TBK1) As A Novel Cancer Immunotherapy Target
*Tara Miller Melanoma Foundation - MRA Young Investigator Award*
Russell Jenkins M.D., Ph.D., Massachusetts General Hospital

Transcriptional and Epigenetic Regulators of Melanoma Initiation
*MRA Young Investigator Award*
Charles K. Kaufman M.D., Ph.D., Washington University in St. Louis

Dissecting tumor-immune cell interactions in uveal melanoma
*Ellen and Gary Davis - MRA Young Investigator Award*
Ashley Laughney Ph.D., Weill Cornell Medical College

Identifying new molecular targets and drugs to treat resistant Melanoma
*Jill and Jay Bernstein - MRA Young Investigator Award*
Nir London Ph.D., Weizmann Institute

Factors that Influence Artificial Intelligence-based Melanoma Diagnosis
*Michael and Jacqueline Ferro Family Foundation - MRA Young Investigator Award for Artificial Intelligence Applied to Melanoma*
Veronica Rotemberg M.D., Ph.D., Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center

Elucidating cross-presentation of melanoma-derived antigens
*Lee Grinberg Family - MRA Young Investigator Award*
Stefani Spranger Ph.D., Massachusetts Institute of Technology

The multifaceted Ambra1-based signaling in melanoma response to therapy
*MRA Young Investigator Award*
Daniela De Zio Ph.D., Kraeftens Bekaempelse

Pilot Awards:

Development of Novel YAP-TEAD Inhibitors for Uveal Melanoma
*MRA Pilot Award*
Fernando Camargo Ph.D., Children's Hospital Boston

Mitochondrial Control of Melanoma Initiation
*MRA Pilot Award, collaboratively funded by Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai*
Jerry Chipuk Ph.D., Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai
Blood vessel co-option by brain tropic melanoma cells  
*MRA Pilot Award*  
Andrew Dudley Ph.D., The University of Virginia

Spliced immune receptors for immune regulation and melanoma immunotherapy  
*MRA Pilot Award*  
Michal Lotem M.D., Hadassah Hebrew University Medical Center

Targeting ferroptosis to combat resistant forms of melanoma  
*MRA Pilot Award*  
James Olzmann Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley

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**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 over $110 million and leveraged an additional $150 million 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.