

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**MELANOMA RESEARCH ALLIANCE ANNOUNCES \$5.2 MILLION  
IN NEW GRANTS TO SUPPORT SIX INNOVATIVE  
MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH PROGRAMS**

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**In its Third Year, MRA Has Awarded \$22 Million in  
Fight To Find Cures for Melanoma**

WASHINGTON, D.C., August 19, 2010 – The Melanoma Research Alliance (“MRA”) today announced \$5.2 million in grants to support six multidisciplinary teams pursuing innovative, translational research approaches designed to benefit melanoma patients.

MRA is a non-profit organization that supports novel [research programs](#) worldwide that will advance scientific understanding of melanoma needed to enable the development of better prevention, diagnosis, and treatment approaches. In completing this third grant cycle, MRA has awarded nearly \$22 million to 50 programs in eight countries and has made significant progress – from studies published in high-impact peer-reviewed journals to patent applications, from scientific meeting presentations to new cross-sector collaborations.

The [six programs](#) receiving the new grants include a total of 22 principal investigators from 10 U.S. institutions and centers. These programs focus on improving treatment approaches for metastatic melanoma, including studies of immunotherapies and molecularly targeted therapies.

Each year, more than 132,000 new cases of melanoma are diagnosed globally. In the U.S., alone, melanoma incidence has tripled over the past three decades and is currently one of the top ten causes of new cancers. Approximately one American is diagnosed every eight minutes and one American dies every hour from melanoma. Very early stage melanoma is greater than 90 percent curable with surgery, while patients with disseminated Stage IV melanoma have a median life expectancy of less than one year.

“MRA is committed to combating this deadly disease and, with each grant cycle, our commitment is strengthened as we see the progress that is made through novel, creative and collaborative approaches to defeating melanoma,” said Wendy Selig, President and CEO, MRA. “The research projects awarded today represent cutting-edge work that we expect will help accelerate and translate scientific knowledge into clinical advances that will benefit patients.”

The following programs received 2010 MRA Team Science Awards:

- **Studies on the mechanisms of de novo and acquired resistance to selective BRAF inhibition.** Identifying mechanisms underlying resistance to highly

selective BRAF inhibitors to develop more effective approaches using these agents

Principal Investigators: David Solit, M.D. and Paul Chapman, M.D., of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center; Michael Davies, M.D., Ph.D., University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center; Roger Lo, M.D., Ph.D., University of California Los Angeles; David Fisher, M.D., Ph.D., Keith Flaherty, M.D., and Hensin Tsao, M.D., Ph.D., Massachusetts General Hospital; Katherine Nathanson, M.D., University of Pennsylvania; and Jeffrey Sosman, M.D., Vanderbilt University.

- **Modulating anti-tumor immunity with dendritic cells (Henry Silverman-MRA Team Science Award Recipient)-** Activating toll-like receptors on dendritic cells to stimulate effective immune responses against melanoma.

Principal Investigators: Nina Bhardwaj, M.D., Ph.D., New York University; Jedd Wolchok, M.D., Ph.D., Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center

- **Development of targeted therapies for Gq/11 mutant melanomas-** Identifying predictive biomarkers in ocular melanoma patients treated with a MEK inhibitor

Principal Investigators: Boris Bastian, M.D., Richard Carvajal, M.D., and Gary Schwartz, M.D., Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center.

- **The isolation of human anti-MICA monoclonal antibodies-** Characterizing specific antibodies arising in patients benefiting from immunotherapy, to test them for therapeutic benefit

Principal Investigators: Glenn Dranoff, M.D., and Kai Wucherpfennig, M.D., Ph.D., Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.

- **Advanced immune monitoring and T-cell receptor (TCR) cloning in clinical trials of TCR engineered adoptive cell transfer therapy-** Improving the performance of adoptive T cell transfer therapy through new generation immune monitoring assays and molecular cloning of T-cell receptors

Principal Investigators: Antoni Ribas, M.D., The University of California, Los Angeles; David Baltimore, Ph.D., and James H. Heath, M.D., California Institute of Technology

- **Strategies to enhance the efficacy of adoptive T-cell therapy-** Combining vaccine with adoptive T cell transfer to enhance T-cell survival and expansion

Principal Investigators: Cassian Yee, M.D., Stan Riddell, M.D., and Philip Greenberg, M.D., Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center.

“MRA is honored to support these six collaborative, outcomes-oriented programs,” said Debra Black, Co-Founder and Board Chair of MRA. “The quality of proposals we received is a testament to the scientific community’s commitment to advancing medical solutions for melanoma patients.”

Since its inception, the founders of MRA have committed a total of \$40 million over six years to spur innovative research and stimulate broader support to generate the resources necessary to defeat melanoma.

This year’s [Team Science Awards](#) included the MRA’s second sponsored award, with the research program, “*Modulating anti-tumor immunity with dendritic cells,*” receiving the *Henry Silverman-MRA Team Science Award*. This award was established through the generous support of Henry Silverman, member of the MRA Board.

MRA also just released a [request for proposals](#) for the 2011 grant cycle. Grant requests are reviewed by MRA’s Grant Review Committee, comprised of leading medical and scientific experts, and presented to the MRA Board of Directors, for final authorization. For more information on the MRA’s grants, full abstracts and application process, please visit [www.melanomaresearchalliance.org](http://www.melanomaresearchalliance.org).

### **About the Melanoma Research Alliance**

The Melanoma Research Alliance is a public charity formed 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 issues leading to better treatments and a cure for patients with melanoma.

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