



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Melanoma Research Alliance Advances Scientific Discovery
with \$3.3 Million for Innovative Research Awards**

Total Investment Reaches Nearly \$25 Million for 65 Research Programs Worldwide

WASHINGTON, April 15, 2011 – The Melanoma Research Alliance (MRA), the largest private funder of melanoma research, has announced \$3.3 million in research grants to 15 investigators pursuing innovative research to better diagnose, stage and treat melanoma. This round of grants funding total includes two projects co-funded with other foundations. To date, MRA has awarded multi-year grants totaling nearly \$25 million supporting 65 projects to 101 principal investigators at 50 institutions in nine countries.

“After decades of limited progress in the field, this is a time of new hope for melanoma research,” said Suzanne Topalian, M.D., chief science officer. “The MRA scientific program is supporting vital areas of investigation to improve upon promising approaches and catalyze transformative advances designed to bring near-term benefits to patients and those at risk.”

This round of funding includes unique collaborations that amplify MRA’s reach in the field of melanoma and leverages an additional \$500,000, in addition to MRA’s commitment of \$2.8 million. The Canadian Cancer Society (CCS) is co-funding a Young Investigator Award, and the Melanoma Research Foundation (MRF) is co-funding an Established Investigator Award.

The contributions of individual and corporate donors have provided funding that make these grants possible, including Stewart Rahr, Akin Gump, Pricewaterhouse Coopers, Judy and Russell Carson, Cartier, Ellen and Gary Davis, The Lawrence and Carol Saper Foundation, Elizabeth and Oliver Stanton, Latham & Watkins, and SkinCeuticals. Additional donors came together in groups to sponsor individual awards.

“We strive to work across the field and across sectors to collaborate with individuals and organizations who share our mission of eliminating suffering and death due to melanoma,” said Wendy K.D. Selig, president and CEO of MRA. “MRA is proud to partner with our colleagues and supporters to make an even bigger impact in the field.”

Nine of the new grant recipients qualified for **Young Investigator Awards**, a record number awarded in a single year by MRA. These awards are specifically designated to

attract early career scientists with novel ideas into melanoma research, thereby recruiting and supporting the next generation of melanoma researchers.

- Christian Blank, M.D., Ph.D., The Netherlands Cancer Institute in Amsterdam, “Development of combined molecular/immunotherapy regimens for human melanoma”
- David Dankort, Ph.D., McGill University in Montreal, “Targeting critical Pten/PI3K pathway targets in BRAF600E malignant melanoma.” CCS is contributing additional funding to this project.
- Alexander Lesokhin, M.D., Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York, “Myeloid derived suppressor cells and immunotherapy outcomes in melanoma”
- Roger Lo, M.D., Ph.D., University of California, Los Angeles, “Epigenetic control of PDGFRbeta expression in PLX4032 acquired resistance”
- Aaron Mackey, Ph.D., University of Virginia in Charlottesville, “Markers and mechanisms of melanoma resistance to combination chemotherapy”
- Guangyong Peng, M.D., Ph.D., Saint Louis University, “Novel strategies targeting Treg cell suppression for melanoma immunotherapy”
- Christine Pratilas, M.D., Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York, “Feedback adaptation of RAF-MEK-ERK signaling in BRAF mutant melanomas”
- Bin Zheng, Ph.D., Columbia University Medical Center in New York, “Targeting the LKB1-AMPK Signaling Pathway in Malignant Melanoma”
- Li Zhou, M.D., Henry Ford Health System in Detroit, “Circulating microRNAs as diagnosis and staging biomarkers for melanoma”

Three proposals received the **Established Investigator Award**, a program that supports senior investigators with an established record of scientific productivity and accomplishment to pursue innovative melanoma research proposals.

- J. William Harbour, M.D., Washington University in St. Louis, “Targeting the Bap1 tumor suppressor gene in a mouse model of melanoma.” This award is co-funded by the MRF.
- David Kranz, Ph.D., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, “Optimal T Cell Receptor Affinity for Adoptive T Cell Therapy of Melanoma”
- Ze'ev Ronai, Ph.D., Sanford-Burnham Medical Research Institute in La Jolla, Calif., “Combined inhibition of NF-kappaB and AKT for melanoma treatment”

Three **Pilot Awards** were given, to pursue early concept research in melanoma.

- Kenneth Bradley, Ph.D., University of California, Los Angeles, “Repurposing anthrax toxin for imaging and treatment of melanoma”
- Eva Hernando, Ph.D., New York University School of Medicine, “Epigenetic differentiation therapy for melanoma”
- Brian Rubin, M.D., Ph.D., Cleveland Clinic Foundation, “In vitro and in vivo models for the study of KIT-activated melanoma”

“We are inspired by the innovative research that we saw in this round of grant proposals,” said Debra Black, founder and chair. “These awards allow us to continue our mission of finding and funding the most promising melanoma research worldwide.”

MRA will announce additional funding in early summer. MRA's Grant Review Committee is currently reviewing proposals for the 2011 Team Science Awards and Academic-Industrial Partnership Awards.

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About the Melanoma Research Alliance

The Melanoma Research Alliance is a public charity formed 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 issues leading to better treatments and a cure for patients with melanoma. Since its founding in 2007, MRA has become the largest private funder of melanoma research. For more information about MRA's research programs, visit www.melanomaresearchalliance.org.

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