

Melanoma

Research Alliance

MELANOMA TREATMENTS MADE GREAT STRIDES IN 2015

MRA cautions that, despite apparent breakthroughs, there is still much work to do
Therapies developed for melanoma now leading to successful treatments for
other types of cancer, as well

Washington, DC, Dec. 23, 2015 –Never been has there been a more hopeful time for patients with melanoma, according to the Melanoma Research Alliance (MRA). While once almost always fatal for anyone with metastatic melanoma, recent advances in treatment, many of which came to market in 2015, have given hope of a longer life, says the MRA.

The past few years have been an extraordinary era for major drug approvals for [treating metastatic melanoma](#), with 11 new therapeutic options coming available since 2011. Today, one out of five patients treated with the early immunotherapy drug, ipilimumab, are alive after 10 years – a remarkable improvement from just a few years ago. And perhaps just as remarkably, several immunotherapy treatments developed for melanoma are translating well to treatments in other types of cancer. Approaches first pioneered in melanoma are now being studied in upwards of 30 tumor types.

“Melanoma research has really led the way in terms of developing immunotherapies for attacking cancer, and we’re beginning to see the benefits across the field of oncology,” said Robin Davisson, Ph.D., President and CEO-Elect of MRA. “We’re on the cusp of a turning point in the history of cancer treatment, but we must continue to push for more innovation to bring benefit to more patients.”

Some of the advances for melanoma treatments in 2015 include:

- The first combination [immunotherapy](#) – ipilimumab and nivolumab – is approved by FDA
- [Nivolumab](#) is approved as a first line of treatment, marking the first anti-PD-1 immunotherapy drug for previously untreated BRAF wild-type melanoma
- T-VEC, an oncolytic viral therapy that is directly injected into a tumor, is the first of its kind treatment to be approved
- The targeted therapies vemurafenib and cobimetinib are approved by the FDA, the first melanoma combination approval that includes a never-before-approved drug
- [Ipilimumab](#) is approved for adjuvant treatment, the first checkpoint inhibitor drug approved in the adjuvant setting
- Pembrolizumab is approved as a first line of treatment for metastatic melanoma regardless of a patient’s BRAF status – the first anti-PD-1 therapy to receive such designation

“The progress has been truly dramatic, even game-changing, and some of the new drugs designed for melanoma patients are now being successfully used to treat patients with other cancers, so the potential is huge,” said MRA’s Chief Science Officer Louise Perkins, Ph.D. “We’re terrifically energized, but we won’t stop until we have reached our ultimate goal of eradicating this terrible disease.”

The MRA cautioned that despite the progress, nearly 10,000 people are still expected this year to succumb to melanoma, the most deadly form of skin cancer, and that research is still needed to find definitive treatments or a cure.

In the coming years, research must focus on identifying mechanisms of resistance and understanding combinations and new therapies to improve outcomes, added Perkins.

MRA, founded by Debra and Leon Black eight years ago, today is the largest private funder of melanoma research. The Blacks have underwritten the cost of operating MRA, so that all funds collected from other donors are applied to research. To date, MRA has invested nearly \$68 million in research studies, and has funded research on every new drug that has been approved in the last five years.

About The Melanoma Research Alliance (MRA)

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 is the largest private funder of melanoma research and has provided nearly \$68 million to research seeking to better prevent, diagnose, and treat melanoma, the deadliest type of skin cancer. Due to the ongoing support of its founders, 100 percent of every dollar MRA raises goes to support 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 www.CureMelanoma.org for more information, or follow us on [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#).

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