

# Melanoma

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## Research Alliance

### 2015 ASCO MEETING HIGHLIGHTS IMPACT OF MELANOMA RESEARCH ON FIELD OF ONCOLOGY

CHICAGO, June 3, 2015—The American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) meeting featured immunotherapy advances as a major topic of interest in the field of oncology, spurred by the pioneering work in melanoma research. The data presented at the annual meeting demonstrate a deepening understanding of immunotherapy – using the body’s own immune system to fight disease – as well as important biomarkers that may help tailor treatments for better results for patients across the cancer spectrum.

Researchers shared results of several studies on immunotherapy, biomarkers, targeted agents, and combination approaches. In all, 44 investigators affiliated with the Melanoma Research Alliance (MRA) presented at the ASCO annual meeting, which ran from May 29 – June 2. Highlights from a few of these MRA-funded investigators include the following:

- **Jedd D. Wolchok, MD, PhD**, shared [results from a Phase 3 trial](#) involving more than 900 patients that tested three different therapies for melanoma: ipilimumab (Yervoy) alone, nivolumab (Opdivo) alone, or the two drugs in combination. The patient benefit with either single-agent nivolumab or in combination with ipilimumab showed clear superiority to ipilimumab alone, although the side-effects of the combination are significant. Based on the anti-melanoma activity seen in this study, along with [other recent findings](#), **Michael B. Atkins, MD** in his commentary proposed that anti-PD-1 therapy is a new standard for the first-line treatment for metastatic melanoma supplanting ipilimumab in that position.
- **Georgina V. Long, PhD**, presented [results of a Phase 3 trial](#) of BRAF and MEK inhibitors, looking at dabrafenib (Tafinlar) and trametinib (Mekinist), which demonstrated improvement in overall survival when using the combination of the two therapies, compared to dabrafenib alone.
- ASCO presented its highest honor, the David A. Karnofsky Memorial Award and Lecture, to MRA Board Member **Suzanne L. Topalian, MD**, for her work in the area of PD-1 immunotherapy and biomarkers. Additionally, MRA-funded investigator **James P. Allison, PhD**, received the Science of Oncology of Award and Lecture for his work on antitumor responses by the immune system.

“We’re thrilled to see Dr. Topalian recognized for her significant contributions to the field of immunotherapy, and oncology overall,” said **Margaret Anderson**, Acting CEO of MRA. “Her work on anti-PD-1 and related biomarkers has helped spur amazing improvements for cancer patients around the globe through these cutting-edge approaches.”

“It was exciting to see progress made in melanoma extend throughout the oncology community at this year’s ASCO,” noted **Louise M. Perkins, PhD**, Chief Science Officer at MRA. “We’re at a point where we have a cadre of approved drugs and research is exploring improvements via new targets, combination approaches and biomarkers as we work to functionally cure more and more patients.”

### **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 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. Visit [www.CureMelanoma.org](http://www.CureMelanoma.org) for more information.

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