

# MD Anderson, AbbVie connect to advance cancer immunotherapy

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The immunotherapy platform at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center and the global biopharmaceutical company AbbVie will join forces to find new ways to unleash the immune system's potential to fight cancer.

The three-year collaboration agreement provides a framework for MD Anderson and AbbVie to efficiently choose and carry out preclinical and clinical studies evaluating new ideas in the cutting-edge area of immunology.

"AbbVie has both identified new molecules and developed novel technology to hit key targets, with the objective of designing new immunotherapy for the benefit of our patients," said Padmanee Sharma, M.D., Ph.D., immunotherapy platform scientific director and professor of Genitourinary Medical Oncology and Immunology at MD Anderson.

Existing immunotherapy drugs thwart tumors and significantly extend survival in groups of patients with advanced melanoma and lung cancer, and they also are being tested in other cancer types. Jim Allison, Ph.D., executive director of the immunotherapy platform and chair of Immunology at MD Anderson notes there are more potential targets for drugs to mobilize the immune system to attack other cancers.

"Cancer immunotherapy drugs that remove two types of brakes on [immune response](#) are really just the tip of the iceberg for this field," Allison said. "Our agreements with companies such as AbbVie allow

academic and industry scientists to work efficiently to move the science forward and extend this approach to more patients." The immunotherapy platform is part of MD Anderson's Moon Shots Program.

AbbVie's research efforts in immunotherapy leverage the company's strengths in biology, protein engineering and chemistry.

"Pairing MD Anderson's cutting-edge preclinical, translational and clinical capabilities with AbbVie's innovative discovery and development programs accelerates our ability to deliver new therapies that can help transform the lives of people affected by cancer," said Michael Severino, M.D., executive vice president, R&D and chief scientific officer, AbbVie. "AbbVie is pleased to partner with MD Anderson's world class experts so that together we can advance the science of cancer immunotherapy for the benefit of patients around the world."

AbbVie and MD Anderson will each assign two scientists to a joint scientific committee, which decides on projects to pursue. "With the collaboration agreement in place, we can move quickly to design and implement new studies, clinical trials, and exchanges of reagents and take other actions without having to reach new, separate agreements," Sharma said.

The collaboration will get underway with projects driven by AbbVie Biotherapeutics, AbbVie's center of innovation in the biotech hub of the San Francisco Bay Area. Future projects will draw from the extensive portfolio of oncology programs across the AbbVie Oncology pipeline.

The AbbVie agreement is the first of a limited number to come in a new wave of collaborations with MD Anderson's immunotherapy platform, said Ferran Prat, Ph.D., J.D., vice president of Strategic Ventures.

MD Anderson's immunotherapy platform combines expertise and advanced technology for preclinical modeling, innovative clinical trials and immune monitoring before, during and after treatment to better understand drug mechanisms and identify biomarkers to guide treatment.

The platform works collaboratively with a select group of pharmaceutical companies and with MD Anderson's moon shots, a transdisciplinary initiative to accelerate development of new treatments and prevention programs deriving from scientific discoveries.

Platform leader Allison invented the breakthrough immunotherapy approach called immune checkpoint blockade, which uses antibodies to block proteins on the surface of T cells that otherwise shut down T cells' attack on cancer.

Provided by University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center

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