

Preeminent experts provide roadmap for future melanoma research

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Melanoma in skin biopsy with H&E stain—this case may represent superficial spreading melanoma. Credit: Wikipedia/CC BY-SA 3.0

Recently the Melanoma Research Foundation (MRF) convened a summit of internationally-renowned melanoma experts for an in-depth discussion on the current understanding of, and future recommendations for, melanoma research. The result of the comprehensive process is a

new white paper entitled, "The State of Melanoma: Challenges and Opportunities," published in the latest edition of the premier melanoma journal, *Pigment Cell & Melanoma Research*. In the white paper, the melanoma experts, including researchers, clinicians and patient advocates, identify the critical issues related to prevention, detection and early diagnosis, dormancy, metastasis and therapy.

"The MRF brought together these experts to develop recommendations that will drive the future of melanoma research and make major strides toward our goal of eradicating this deadly and elusive cancer once and for all," said Tim Turnham, Ph.D., executive director of the MRF.

"Throughout the past ten years progress has been made in understanding melanoma, but the work is not done. Still, almost half of people with melanoma are without effective treatment options. This collaborative process and the resulting roadmap will help us get there."

In 2016 an estimated 144,000 people will be diagnosed with melanoma, resulting in nearly 10,000 deaths. Ten new therapeutic regimens were approved from 2011 to 2015 giving hope to patients and families. Despite the advances in these new treatments much is unknown including how to sequence and/or combine available treatments, what allows some tumors to build up resistance to therapy, and which drug is likely to work best with which patient.

"The MRF, together with the melanoma scientific and research communities, is unnerved that melanoma continues to effect hundreds of thousands of people every year. Because of this, we felt it absolutely necessary to spearhead this discussion among leading melanoma researchers," continued Turnham. "To decrease the incidence and mortality of melanoma, a number of critical questions must be answered. We're pleased this [white paper](#) does just that."

The white paper includes a roadmap that outlines the challenges and

opportunities across the melanoma landscape. Key takeaways include:

- Proper use of sunscreen can reduce incidence of melanoma by up to 50%. Current sunscreens block portions of both UVA and UVB, but not everything within those bands. More research needs to be done about what range of wavelengths in the UV band needs to be blocked.
- Melanoma cells have demonstrated the ability to remain dormant in the body for many years—even decades. Understanding how these cells can survive and what causes them to awaken and progress is a vital component to melanoma treatment.
- Currently 25 biopsies are performed for every melanoma found. Given the incidence of melanoma, and a demonstrated 40-70% underreporting rate, this translates to more than 4 million biopsies performed to diagnose 170,000 melanomas. Developing more precise methods of diagnosis will reduce anxiety for patients and significantly benefit healthcare costs.
- Clinicians are seeing resistance to immunotherapy develop after an initial positive response. Identifying how acquired resistance happens—whether with targeted therapy or immunotherapy—and how to overcome resistance is essential in maximizing the benefit of these treatments.

"Melanoma has several unique characteristics, which pose challenges for its prevention and treatment" said Ze'ev A. Ronai, Ph.D. Professor and Chief Scientific Advisor, Sanford Burnham Perbys Medical Discovery Institute, and Co-Chair of the MRF's Scientific Advisory Committee.

"Continued research is key to understanding the mechanisms behind the disease's development and growth, and is necessary to advance the treatment of - and potential cure for - melanoma. This document will help researchers, funders and advocates determine how their approach to [melanoma](#) fits within the current landscape and future needs."

More information: Glenn Merlino et al. The state of melanoma: challenges and opportunities, *Pigment Cell & Melanoma Research* (2016). [DOI: 10.1111/pcmr.12475](https://doi.org/10.1111/pcmr.12475)

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