



## **MIA leads Australian research with major breakthrough which pioneers the new way of treating cancer;**

***The best ever results seen in metastatic melanoma treatment have been presented at the International ASCO Conference.***

**Strictly embargoed until 4am Monday, 1 June 2015;** Melanoma Institute Australia (MIA) has again attended the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) summit in Chicago; where the best ever results seen in metastatic melanoma treatment have been presented. Two large international trials, conducted at MIA, have shown that combinations of new melanoma drugs result in major improvements in disease control and patient survival compared to current therapy.

One study (CheckMate 067), headlining the largest cancer conference in the world and presented in the plenary session, was the first phase 3 trial to combine modern immunotherapy drugs in any cancer. The trial demonstrated improvements in both tumour response and patient survival with combination of ipilimumab (Yervoy®) with the PD-1 antibody nivolumab (Opdivo®) compared to either therapy given alone, and not only signifies a major advance for melanoma treatment, but provides the impetus to take this approach forward in other cancer types and with other drugs.

Updated results were presented from a second study of targeted therapy (COMBI-D), where a BRAF inhibitor (dabrafenib) was combined with a MEK inhibitor (trametinib) compared to BRAF inhibitor alone. Again, patients responded better and lived longer with better quality of life with combination treatment, cementing this as the new standard targeted therapy treatment for metastatic melanoma.

Associate Professor Georgina Long of MIA and the University of Sydney, the Principal Investigator of these trials at MIA, says "Melanoma Institute Australia is leading the way and making major steps forward in cancer history. Two large clinical trials presented at ASCO show that two drugs are better than one for improving patient outcome, both for targeted therapies and immunotherapies, and are the new way of treating cancer."

In April a study lead by MIA found that the PD-1 antibody pembrolizumab (KEYTRUDA®) prolonged survival and had less high-grade toxicity compared with ipilimumab (YERVOY®) in patients with advanced melanoma, where melanoma has spread to distant parts of the body. The results from this latest announcement at ASCO prove that the combination of immunotherapy drugs are a better alternative for the majority of melanoma patients.

"MIA has already broken ground with the PD-1 study that showed that PD-1 antibody pembrolizumab is better than current treatments for patients with advance melanoma, reducing the size of tumours in 70% of patients and recording a one year survival rate of 74% where it had previously been 58%. The latest findings of combination immunotherapies is the next level of how we treat not just melanoma, but cancer around the world," Associate Professor Alex Guminski, Clinical Researcher and Consultant Medical Oncologist, Melanoma Institute Australia.

"The latest results are more great news for patients with melanoma, and has implications for all cancer patients. By focusing on the science behind cancer, we can design further treatments that improve response and survival, and hopefully even cure some people," says Assoc Professor Long.

***Melanoma Institute Australia (MIA) is a non-profit organisation so donation dollars are vital in continuing these important research trials that are changing the way we treat melanoma and cancer. To donate visit [www.melanoma.org.au](http://www.melanoma.org.au)***

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#### **NB: Disclosures**

**CheckMate 067 – (Jedd D. Wolchok)** - Consultant/advisory relationship: Bristol-Myers Squibb: Grant funding: Bristol-Myers Squibb, Medimmune, Merck: Personal fees: Bristol-Myers Squibb, Jounce, Medimmune, Merck, Polaris, Polynoma, Potenza, Ziopharm

**COMBI-D – (A/P Georgina Long)** Consultant: GSK, Amgen, BMS, Merck MSD, Novartis, Provectus, Roche; Honoraria: GSK, BMS, Merck MSD, Roche: COMBI-d was sponsored by GlaxoSmithKline (NCT01584648); dabrafenib and trametinib are the property of Novartis Pharma AG as of March 1, 2015.

#### **Backgrounder on melanoma:**

In 2009, the 1-year survival rate for patients with stage 4 melanoma was only 30 per cent.

With advances in medical research, today we are seeing survival rates of up to 80 per cent.

- Half of patients diagnosed with stage 4 melanoma will develop brain metastases at some point during their illness, and 20–25 per cent will already have brain metastases when first diagnosed with stage 4 melanoma.
- Australia has the highest incidence of melanoma in the world and is often referred to as “Australia’s national cancer”.
- Around 12,500 new cases are diagnosed each year and it is responsible for over 1,500 deaths.
- One person every six hours will die from melanoma in Australia.
- Melanoma is the most common cancer in young Australians, affecting more individuals aged 15 to 39 than any other cancer.
- While 90 per cent of people with melanoma are able to be cured by having the primary melanoma cancer removed, the cancer spreads in the other 10 per cent because it is caught too late.

#### **Melanoma Institute Australia**

- Melanoma Institute Australia (MIA) is a non-profit organisation dedicated to preventing and curing melanoma through innovative research, treatment and education programs.
- Headquartered at the Poche Centre in North Sydney, it is now the world’s largest melanoma research and treatment centre.
- MIA is affiliated with The University of Sydney, St Vincent’s and Mater Health Sydney, The Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and Australian & New Zealand Melanoma Trials Group (ANZMTG).

- Melanoma Institute Australia relies on the generosity of individuals, organisations and government funding to continue its ground-breaking work into this potentially devastating cancer.
- You can follow Melanoma Institute Australia on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/pages/Melanoma-Institute-Australia](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Melanoma-Institute-Australia) or on Twitter at [@MelanomaAus](https://twitter.com/MelanomaAus).