

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Thursday, May 27, 2010

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THE WISTAR INSTITUTE LAUNCHES NEW MELANOMA RESEARCH CENTER

New Center Takes Comprehensive Approach to Beating Back the Deadliest of Skin Cancers in All of Its Many Forms

PHILADELPHIA – (May 27, 2010) – In an effort to meet the rising rates of melanoma head-on, The Wistar Institute today announced the creation of The Wistar Institute Melanoma Research Center. The Center brings together scientists, physicians, the life sciences industry, and melanoma advocates in saving lives by advancing new and better therapies for this deadly disease.

“Melanoma is in desperate need of therapeutic options, but there is no cure on the horizon,” said the Center’s director, Meenhard Herlyn, D.V.M., D.Sc., professor and leader of Wistar’s Molecular and Cellular Oncogenesis Program. “Through this Center, we aim to take a comprehensive look at the nature of melanoma and plan out exactly the steps we need to take to develop new methods of detection, prevention and therapy.”

Under Herlyn’s leadership of one of the nation’s most prestigious melanoma laboratories, Wistar has established a track record of melanoma research advances that spans more than 25 years. Recent discoveries by Herlyn and his colleagues have changed the science of melanoma, from basic genetics to new concepts that describe the stem cell-like abilities of melanoma cells to evade treatment. The Herlyn laboratory also pioneered the use of the three-dimensional “artificial skin” cell cultures that serve as a model for studying how living tumors behave, as well as a proving ground for new therapeutics.

In addition to providing a base for new melanoma science, The Wistar Institute Melanoma Research Center represents the hub of activity that connects scientists and physicians at universities, independent research institutions, medical centers, and pharmaceutical companies, across the nation and the world. Their combined efforts, driven and supported by the melanoma advocacy community, will bring about new drug trials and renewed hope for melanoma patients and their families, Herlyn says.

“This is a massive undertaking that has a high level of urgency, which I liken to the Manhattan Project,” said Wistar President and CEO Russel E. Kaufman, M.D. “We know our goals are achievable, but to get there will take the direct application of our collective talent, determination and resources.”

Melanoma has reached a crisis point in this country and around the world. The disease remains the deadliest form of skin cancer, with an estimated 68,000 new cases and 8,600 deaths in the United States alone last year, according to the American Cancer Society. Unlike most cancers, the incidence of melanoma is increasing, doubling in the past 30 years in the U.S., despite better detection and a greater awareness of the

dangers of sun and ultraviolet ray exposure. There are no effective treatments for advanced melanoma.

Melanoma is not one disease, but actually a number of genetically unique tumors that arise from the same source, Herlyn says. One of the first goals of the Center will be to delineate the first group of distinct types of melanoma tumors that exist by identifying the specific genes that drive them. It is a process that is already well under way in the Herlyn laboratory. “By knowing exactly which kind of melanoma a patient has, physicians can personalize treatment to the specific needs of that patient,” Herlyn said.

In addition to cancer genetics, the Center’s research program includes:

- **Melanoma Pathways:** All cells, cancerous or not, function through complex networks where genes and proteins relate to each other, either through direct contact or chemical signals. These pathways can be a factor in driving – or stopping – melanoma. Researchers believe that combination therapies, where multiple genes are targeted at once, may be the best bet for preventing drug resistance in melanoma.
- **Melanoma Biomarkers:** The Center also seeks to determine the biological fingerprints – called biomarkers – which clinicians can use to categorize specific melanoma tumor types through either blood test or biopsy. These biomarkers will allow doctors to better diagnose patients and chart their course of treatment.
- **Biological Basis for Melanoma Prevention:** Although Americans tend to spend less time in the sun today than our most recent generations of ancestors did, we are more likely to suffer from the effects of ultraviolet light, which can account for rising melanoma rates. If properly studied, the molecular changes in skin cells behind this phenomenon could one day be applied to preventing melanoma.

“The scientific goals of The Wistar Institute Melanoma Research Center are nothing short of a complete understanding of melanoma biology,” said Herlyn. “The technical tools exist to make this happen, and we hope that, through the creation of this Center, we can apply the societal tools necessary to see that the job gets done.”

For more information about the research program of The Wistar Institute Melanoma Research Center and a complete listing of its collaborators, please visit the Center’s website at www.wistar.org/melanomacenter.

The Wistar Institute is an international leader in biomedical research with special expertise in cancer research and vaccine development. Founded in 1892 as the first independent nonprofit biomedical research institute in the country, Wistar has long held the prestigious Cancer Center designation from the National Cancer Institute. The Institute works actively to ensure that research advances move from the laboratory to the clinic as quickly as possible. The Wistar Institute: Today’s Discoveries – Tomorrow’s Cures. On the Web at www.wistar.org.

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