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Contact: Berna Diehl
Jones Public Affairs
(202) 591-4045
Berna@JonesPA.com

Approval of New Melanoma Therapy Changes Landscape for Patients
-FDA decision on immunotherapy means first new treatment option in more than a decade becoming available-

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Thirteen years of waiting is now over for melanoma patients. That’s how long it’s been since the last therapy became available to treat the most lethal form of skin cancer – melanoma. The FDA today announced approval of Yervoy, an immunotherapy treatment for advanced melanoma.

The drug will be used to treat melanoma patients whose cancer has spread to other parts of the body. It is the first approved drug that has extended the lives of patients with advanced melanoma.

“This is a critical breakthrough for advanced-stage melanoma patients who have far too few approved treatment options available,” said Timothy J. Turnham, the executive director of the Melanoma Research Foundation (MRF). “Patients have been waiting for a life-changing innovation like this one and news of the approval has galvanized the patient community.”

Melanoma is among the most difficult cancers to treat and is the deadliest skin cancer. For patients diagnosed with the advanced stages of the disease, the median lifespan is less than one year. The last therapeutic to be approved for melanoma, Interleukin-2, only benefits 10-15 percent of those with advanced melanoma.

“The FDA’s decision to approve Yervoy is an important step forward for melanoma patients, but the work isn’t done,” Turnham said. “Until all patients have an option that can treat or cure their disease, we need to redouble our efforts.” Similar to the advances that were made in the development of “drug cocktails” for patients with HIV/AIDS, most melanoma researchers agree that testing combination therapies, including using Yervoy, is the key to achieving significant strides for a broader spectrum of patients.

With approval comes a major shift in the treatment landscape for patients. As patients work to discern their options, connecting with other patients becomes more critical. The MRF hosts the Melanoma Patient Information Page, which is the leading online community gathering spot for melanoma patients.

“As this exciting new therapy becomes available, patients will no doubt have many questions about their personal treatment options,” Turnham said. “The MRF is dedicated to facilitating...
conversations among patients and encouraging information sharing that is critical to successfully fighting melanoma."

The MRF, the largest independent, national organization devoted to melanoma in the nation, is committed to funding medical research to find effective treatments and eventually a cure for melanoma. The MRF has invested more than $1 million in research grants to support the development of new treatments, including early phases of research for Yervoy.

Researchers have started to uncover that melanoma is actually many different diseases, each with its own unique biology. As a result, successful treatment may require targeted and personalized therapies to treat patients effectively. Melanoma researchers are working to translate that understanding into therapies that might have a meaningful impact on the survival of patients. The MRF’s support of combination trials of therapeutics has translated into the development of a clinical trial that will be launched in the fall of 2011.

For more information about the MRF and treatment options for melanoma, visit www.melanoma.org. If you are a patient who wants to explore the full range of treatment options, visit MRF’s new clinical trial finder at http://www.emergingmed.com/networks/MRF.

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**About Melanoma**

Melanoma, the most serious type of skin cancer, is one of the fastest growing cancers in the United States and can strike men and women of all ages, all races and skin types. In fact, with a one in 50 lifetime risk of developing melanoma, nearly 69,000 Americans were expected to be diagnosed with the disease in 2010, resulting in 8,700 deaths or one person every hour. Melanoma is the most common form of cancer for young adults 25- to 29-years-old and the second most common cancer in adolescents and young adults 15- to 29-years-old.

**About Melanoma Research Foundation**

The Melanoma Research Foundation (MRF) is the largest independent, national organization devoted to melanoma in the United States. Committed to the support of medical research in finding effective treatments and eventually a cure for melanoma, the MRF also educates patients and physicians about prevention, diagnosis and the treatment of melanoma. The MRF is an active advocate for the melanoma community, helping to raise awareness of this disease and the need for a cure. The MRF’s website is the premier source for melanoma information seekers. More information is available at www.melanoma.org.