



Melanoma  
Research  
Victoria  
Together, we can cure

Newsletter

Issue 14, October 2022

## Welcome to our newest consumer representative on the MRV Governance Committee.

**Karin Innes PhD**

As a patent attorney I have drafted patents relating to melanoma treatments and biomarkers, and my PhD research was in the field of hematopoietic cancers. I also worked for a few years as a clinical research associate managing clinical trials in advanced cancers. Needless to say, I know a lot about cancer and melanoma in particular. However, I never thought it would be something that would affect me directly, until it did!. As a patient with advanced melanoma, I was now receiving the immunotherapy treatments I had read and written about in patent specifications and suddenly survival rates and complete response rates were more than just numbers in a publication. It wasn't arms-length anymore and I realise now that at the time of my diagnosis I was so naive to how going through treatment would affect me both mentally and physically. I have benefitted greatly from the expert care

I received from the amazing staff at Peter Mac and am happy to say I am now in remission.

When the opportunity to join the Melanoma Research Victoria Governance Committee came up, I jumped at the chance. Now, as consumer reference group representative on the Committee, I see and review research and clinical trial projects both from the perspective of a scientist but more importantly, from the perspective of a patient with a real interest in research that translates directly to increasing our understanding of the genesis of melanoma and how treatment can be personalised to patients. Anyone who has gone through melanoma treatment knows how brutal the side effects can be and personally, it has left me with the legacy of neuropathy. There are great minds doing great research that will one day provide more certainty for patients in their treatment and identify the most appropriate treatment regimen. I am delighted to be a part of that and will do my best to advocate for the needs of consumers.

## Research at MRV Striving to eliminate the impact of melanoma

Melanoma Research Victoria (MRV) is committed to improving patient outcomes by assisting melanoma research to happen. Our 12 year collection of data and biospecimens has been used in 86 research projects and facilitated collaborations across our five partner sites and with other Victorian, Australian and international laboratories.

MRV's newly updated website features the lay summaries of many of the research projects completed or currently being done by MRV researchers. You can also find more information regarding MRV's data and biospecimen collections there. <https://melanomaresearchvic.com.au/>

MRV has begun a review of its projects with respect to the number of participants and biospecimens used in each. Although this work is ongoing here are some **fast facts** we are excited to share now:

- 8** = the Average (and median) number of projects each MRV participant was included in
- 22** = Highest number of projects a single participant was included in (true for 3 x participants)
- 5** = Smallest number of participants in one project
- 3127** = Largest number of participants in one project
- 51%** = Number of projects using data only
- 41%** = Number of projects using data and biospecimens
- 8%** = Number of projects using Quality Of Life, Medicare or PBS data

## MRV Consumer Update

*MRV is fortunate to have several experienced and generous consumers who participate in a range of research activities. A consumer is a member of the community with a lived experience of Melanoma.*

The MRV Consumer Reference Group (CRG) have been working together with staff to co-design an improved Patient Information and Consent Form. The aim is to produce a document that is truly user-friendly whilst proving all the important facts concerning participation in MRV. This document will form the basis of an

(electronic) eConsent, with its implementation intending to increase accessibility of the project to a larger cohort of participants.

The CRG were involved in the re-design of our website [www.melanomaresearchvic.com.au](http://www.melanomaresearchvic.com.au). In the coming months members of the CRG along with the Project Review Group (PRG) will be taking part in a MRV Researcher Presentation Series. An initiative where researchers are invited to present their new projects, in lay language to consumer members who will provide insights and feedback.

## MRV Researchers Featuring Dr Lorey Smith

Dr Lorey Smith is a Senior Research Officer in Professor Grant McArthur's laboratory at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, and an Honorary Fellow in the Sir Peter MacCallum Department of Oncology, University of Melbourne. Lorey's research aims to identify the mechanisms that underpin melanoma cell plasticity, which is the ability of melanoma cells to rapidly change their characteristics without any permanent changes in their DNA. Lorey is particularly interested in how this contributes to melanoma progression from primary to metastatic disease, and in the response of melanoma cells to currently available therapies. Through this research she aims to identify new therapies that can overcome therapy resistance and recurrence. Lorey's previous research uncovered that how melanoma cells process messenger RNA (mRNA), the molecules required to turn the information in DNA into a protein, plays a major role in therapy-induced adaptation and plasticity<sup>1,2</sup>. These mRNA processing pathways give cells the flexibility required to rapidly adapt and survive stress, and her research has shown that if these pathways are switched off, resistance to targeted therapies can be significantly delayed in pre-clinical models of melanoma. This research has led to a new drug discovery initiative with an industry partner Canthera Discovery. As Project Lead, Lorey coordinates a multi-disciplinary team including biologists, protein chemists, structural biologists, and medicinal chemists, with the aim of developing a new drug that can be tested in patients.

Lorey is now expanding on this research by using brand new research technologies that will allow full-length mRNA molecules from melanoma cells to be sequenced for the first time. This will provide new information about how melanoma cells process mRNA to reprogram themselves during therapy resistance and metastasis. Lorey is also part of an international collaborative research team that is investigating a new biomarker of melanoma recurrence from stage II primary disease. These research projects would not be possible without the generous donation of tissue from MRV participants, and the incredible work of the MRV administration and consumer advisory teams. **"Together we can cure."**



Dr Lorey Smith Source: PMCC

1. Smith, L. K., Parmenter, T., Kleinschmidt, M., Kusnadi, E. P., Kang, J., Martin, C. A., . . . McArthur, G. A. (2022). Adaptive translational reprogramming of metabolism limits the response to targeted therapy in BRAF(V600) melanoma. *Nat Commun*, 13(1), 1100. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-022-28705-x>

2. Channel 7: <https://7news.com.au/news/public-health/aussie-research-aiming-to-starve-melanomas-c-5938674>

## INVITATION 2022 Scientific Exchange Meeting

The annual MRV Scientific Exchange Meeting is open to all members of the melanoma community and brings together researchers, patients, and the public to hear the latest information on melanoma research and treatments. Professor Grant McArthur will host this year's meeting which will showcase presentations on new treatments, prevention, consumer-researcher engagement, MRV's achievements and vignettes from the finalists for the 2022 Morgan Mansell Young Melanoma Researcher of the Year Award.

We hope you can join us for this annual event. It will be a hybrid meeting, both in-person and via zoom.

### Date:

Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> November 2022

**Time:** 6:00-8:00pm

Pre meeting refreshments from 5:15pm.

### Where:

Level 7 Lecture Theatre, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, 305 Grattan Street, Melbourne 3000

Please register via the link below: <https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/mrv-scientific-exchange-meeting-2022-tickets-440756142487>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about attending in person or joining the webinar.

This is a free event kindly supported by BMS. Please note that there is limited seating available.



Website <https://melanomaresearchvic.com.au/>



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