



## The War on Melanoma *Debrief*

February 2016



Hello Melanoma Community Registrants!

In this edition of the *Debrief* we will focus on our basic science melanoma researchers. This is where discoveries begin. They focus on understanding disease at the cellular level. As discoveries are made, they work with other scientists to apply those findings into clinical trials and patient care.

### Training "skin scientists"

As an academic medical center, OHSU trains both healthcare providers and scientists. In order to research disorders of the skin, we need scientists that specialize in our body's largest organ. So how exactly does one become a skin scientist? Firstly, they all have at least a 4-year undergraduate degree in some form of science (chemistry, biology) and many have worked in research labs throughout college. They then pursue advanced specialized training, either before they have achieved their Ph.D. (predoctoral) or after (postdoctoral).

At OHSU we have a trainee program that is supported by a grant from the National Institutes of Health and is directed by Dermatology Research Faculty member Molly Kulesz-Martin, Ph.D. Trainees are taught by 18 faculty mentors from the departments of Dermatology, Cell, Developmental & Cancer Biology, Molecular Microbiology & Immunology, and more. Since being awarded the grant in 2004, we have trained 18 predoctoral and 36 postdoctoral individuals in the molecular basis of skin/mucosa pathobiology. Currently, we have six appointed research trainees who are all pursuing projects related to melanoma.



### Leachman-Cassidy Lab

The life of a basic science researcher rarely includes being in the spotlight. Much of their work is done behind the scenes in a laboratory, and their research descriptions can often sound like a foreign language. While their methods may be complex and difficult for most to understand, one thing is clear – researchers Sancy Leachman, M.D., Ph.D. and Pamela Cassidy, Ph.D. are on the front lines

in the War on Melanoma as they search for new discoveries on melanoma prevention and early detection.



Their projects revolve around the biology of the melanocyte (the cells from which melanoma arises) and by genetic studies of melanoma risk. The treatments they test are designed to alleviate the potentially carcinogenic (cancer) effects of ultraviolet (UV)-induced oxidative stress. Like most research, the process can be arduous and lengthy, but with every step forward they get closer to their ultimate goal: offering patients a personalized program for melanoma prevention and treatment.

## Lund Lab

Amanda Lund, Ph.D., in the Department of Cell, Developmental & Cancer Biology at OHSU is a rising star in research. Her focus is how the immune system can function and fail to battle melanoma. Immunotherapy works by using a patient's own immune response to fight their cancer. Lund believes that the system of lymph nodes, which are the body's drainage system, may have their normal mechanisms hijacked by tumors, suppressing the body's ability to fight the tumor with immune responses. Her lab is studying how lymphatic vessels might contribute to paths of resistance and how understanding their function might provide ways to induce immune responsiveness in patients.



In the past several months, Lund was awarded three research grants (a "triple crown!") to explore her theories and was honored with the Discovery Award for Women in Science at OHSU's 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Women's Leadership Conference.

## Upcoming Event



**Saturday, May 21st, 2016**

**9:00am - 3:00pm**

**Collaborative Life Sciences Building, South Waterfront**

**2730 SW Moody Ave.**

**Portland, OR 97201**

A fun, FREE event promoting skin cancer prevention, early detection, and a means to engage the community in research at OHSU!

- **Melanoma Research:** Presentations by OHSU researchers with Q&A time, info tables on current research, and participation in studies through surveys and/or blood and saliva samples.
- **Redhead World Record Attempt:** We will attempt to set a World Record for the most natural redheads in one place at one time. The goal is to gather over 2016 Redheads to promote melanoma awareness for this high-risk demographic.
- **NW Melanoma 5k Walk and Fun Run:** Join the 5th Annual NW Melanoma Walk and Fun Run! This event, sponsored by AIM at Melanoma, is a community walk to raise awareness and funds for skin cancer.
  - For more information, to register, visit the [AIM at Melanoma Registration Page](#)

For more event information, please visit [www.ohsu.edu/wosc](http://www.ohsu.edu/wosc)

*To view all volunteer opportunities for the War on Skin Cancer Event, visit our volunteer*

*page:* 

## Volunteer Spotlight

**Stephanie Heilman** was reluctantly inspecting the toll pregnancy had taken on her skin when she decided to visit a dermatologist for advice. What she learned that visit would change her life forever, as a "funny" shaped mole on her leg was biopsied and ultimately diagnosed as stage 1 melanoma. Before she knew what hit her, she was carrying her five-week old baby to the dermatologist for the first of her three excisions.

Like most when first diagnosed, Stephanie didn't know much about melanoma. As she learned more about the disease, she realized how serious melanoma can be. She wanted to help people learn about melanoma before others were in a same, or worse, situation.

An avid runner, she reached out to AIM at Melanoma, a non-profit that coordinates walks around the country to raise funds and awareness for skin cancer. This resulted in her partnering to organize the Northwest Melanoma 5k Walk and Fun Run, which has raised nearly \$100,000 for the Melanoma Tissue Bank Consortium at the OHSU Knight Cancer Institute!



Stephanie is coordinating the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Melanoma Walk as part of our War on Skin Cancer event on May 21<sup>st</sup>. The event is free and each participant is asked to raise \$50. For more information, including how to register for the walk, please visit [HERE](#). We hope to see you all then!

**\*\*Want to share your story? The American Academy of Dermatology is encouraging others to share their skin cancer story to help bring awareness and provide encouragement and support to others going through similar challenges. [CLICK HERE](#)\*\***

[Melanoma Community Registry](#)

c/o OHSU Department of Dermatology

Center of Health and Healing

Mail code: CH16D

3303 SW Bond Ave.

Portland, Ore. 97239-4501

[waronmelanoma@ohsu.edu](mailto:waronmelanoma@ohsu.edu)

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