

KILLER TAN

Research
grant focuses
efforts on
disabling
melanoma

Melanoma, the most lethal skin cancer, is the most common form of cancer for young adults 25 to 29 years old. It's also the second most common form of cancer for young people ages 15 to 29. But it can be avoided. In the words of Moffitt Cancer Center's Jeffrey Weber, M.D., Ph.D., "Melanoma continues to rise in incidence worldwide, and has advanced to soon become the fifth most common cancer in the U.S. It strikes those in the prime of life, in their fifties and sixties, and accounts for more years of life lost of any adult cancer." He goes on to say that this trend could be reversed if we engage in safe sun practices, and particularly avoid tanning salons – which are likely to increase the incidence of not only melanoma but also other types of skin cancer.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) expressed concern for this growing problem, as people younger than 35 who participate in indoor tanning have a 75 percent higher risk of getting melanoma.

Obviously, prevention is key. Dr. Weber directs Moffitt's Donald A. Adam Comprehensive Melanoma Research Center of Excellence. The Center's goal is to contribute to the understanding, prevention and cure of melanoma – one of the most serious and difficult skin cancers to treat. He also oversees a newly awarded National Cancer Institute (NCI) Specialized Programs of Research Excellence (SPORE) grant for melanoma research, totaling \$8,829,020 over five years.

"SPORE grants were established to promote interdisciplinary research and help move basic findings from the laboratory to a clinical setting," says Dr. Weber. "The addition of a melanoma SPORE acknowledges the translational research being done by our Comprehensive Melanoma Research Center of Excellence. We are honored to be recognized by the NCI, and this grant will allow us to significantly enhance our efforts to contribute to the

prevention and cure of skin cancer." This is Moffitt's second SPORE grant. The first, for lung cancer research, was awarded in 2008. Moffitt is the only cancer center based in Florida that has received this prestigious grant.

The melanoma SPORE grant has been several years in the making. In 2007, Moffitt was awarded a melanoma SPORE planning grant from Florida's Bankhead-Coley Cancer Research Program spearheaded by Vernon K. Sondak, M.D., chair of Moffitt's Department of Cutaneous Oncology, to help recruit a team of interdisciplinary skin cancer researchers. That same year, Donald A. Adam, a melanoma survivor and banker, donated \$20.4 million to Moffitt for expanding expertise in the area of melanoma research. The gift led to the development of the Donald A. Adam Comprehensive Melanoma Research Center of Excellence and facilitated the recruitment of Dr. Weber.

Today, most melanoma patients participate in a clinical trial. And at Moffitt, several unique trials are exploring innovative approaches to skin cancer treatment aimed at improving the outlook for late-stage patients. Each study taps into Moffitt's culture of teamwork and adaptability in order to quickly bring new scientific discoveries from the laboratory to the bedside. "People are positive and feel rewarded about enrolling in a clinical trial even if the outcome is unknown," says Dr. Weber. According to him, realizing they might be helping someone in the future goes a very long way. 🎧

