

## Bankhead-Coley Cancer Research Program

### **Sondak, Vernon**

*Department of Interdisciplinary Oncology  
H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center  
& Research Institute*

*2007 Program  
Specialized Programs of Research Excellence  
(3-year project)*

#### **Project Title:** Melanoma SPORE Planning Grant

**Project Summary:** Melanoma, the most serious and potentially deadly form of skin cancer, is a major problem in Florida, which has the second-highest melanoma rate in the U.S. It affects all ages, and increasingly all races and ethnic backgrounds. When detected before it has spread, melanoma is highly curable. But in many cases, spread to the lymph nodes or beyond has already occurred before diagnosis. In recent years, basic research scientists have made major advances in melanoma research in the laboratory. Translating these laboratory advances into improvements for melanoma patients requires physician-researchers who can serve as “applied scientists.” Understanding why some melanomas spread when other seemingly similar tumors do not, and learning to harness the immune system to treat widespread melanoma, are two critical areas of research requiring collaboration between surgeons, oncologists and pathologists (“applied” or translational researchers), immunologists, epidemiologists, and molecular biologists if progress is to be made in improving treatment results and increasing survival rates. For the first time, Florida now has the needed critical mass of basic and applied melanoma researchers. This grant is intended to assemble a strong team of interdisciplinary researchers who can bring a successful NCI SPORE grant in Melanoma to the state of Florida. This grant will unite physicians experienced in patient-oriented melanoma research with basic and population scientists, and will extend existing collaborations at the Moffitt Cancer Center and the University of South Florida (USF) as well as establishing new collaborations between physicians and scientists at Moffitt/USF with those throughout the state of Florida. We are committed to the goal of submitting an NCI SPORE grant application within six months of the end of this grant. In order to achieve our goal, this grant supports two collaborative translational melanoma treatment research projects (one on determinants of metastasis to the sentinel lymph node in apparently localized melanoma, the other on dendritic cell vaccine immunotherapy in metastatic melanoma); pilot studies on the influences of age and race/ethnicity on melanoma; career development awards for additional training in melanoma research; establishing an organizational structure promoting cross-fertilization between basic and applied scientists, and fostering collaborations between researchers in Tampa and physicians and scientists throughout the state; meetings of collaborators and advisors; and tumor procurement core facilities to support the scientific goals of the Pre-SPORE and subsequent NCI Melanoma SPORE submission (with expanded inclusion of minority patients). The Pre-SPORE reflects a significant commitment of financial and other resources on the part of Moffitt, USF, and other Florida universities and physicians to the growing melanoma problem. Moffitt has established a Melanoma Center of Excellence, and a goal of this Center is to enhance our ability to obtain an NCI SPORE grant. Hence, the Center’s goals dovetail with those of this grant, and funds from the Center of Excellence are allocated to this grant’s investigators as a manifestation of institutional commitment. The result will be an organizational structure

## **Bankhead-Coley Cancer Research Program**

and research collaborations that markedly increase the chance of bringing a melanoma SPORE grant to the State of Florida.