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32	Abstract	<p>Purpose of Review: Recent developments in immunotherapy have transformed the landscape of melanoma therapy. Here, we review markers for response to immunotherapy.</p> <p>Recent Findings: Current immunotherapies disable immune checkpoints on T cells and other immune cells and allow immune rejection of tumor. This process depends crucially on a preexisting response to the development of the melanoma. Here we describe the complexity of the anti-tumor immune response and the links to the development of markers that are currently used or under investigation in the clinic.</p> <p>Summary: We describe immune response biomarkers along with new developments that could translate into advances.</p>
33	Keywords separated by ' - '	Immune checkpoint inhibitors - Programmed death-1 (PD-1) - Programmed death ligand-1 (PD-L1) - Exhausted T cells (Tex) - Tumor microenvironment (TME) - Memory T cells (Tmem) - Tumor mutation burden - Circulating tumor DNA
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MELANOMA (RJ SULLIVAN, SECTION EDITOR)

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Prognostic Biomarkers for Melanoma Immunotherapy

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Abstract

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Purpose of Review Recent developments in immunotherapy have transformed the landscape of melanoma therapy. Here, we review markers for response to immunotherapy.

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Recent Findings Current immunotherapies disable immune checkpoints on T cells and other immune cells and allow immune rejection of tumor. This process depends crucially on a preexisting response to the development of the melanoma. Here we describe the complexity of the anti-tumor immune response and the links to the development of markers that are currently used or under investigation in the clinic.

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Introduction

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Melanoma treatment has been transformed recently by the development of rapidly accelerated fibrosarcoma (RAF) and mitogen-activated protein (MAP) kinase inhibitors [1–4] and by immune checkpoint Inhibitors (CPI) such as anti-PD-1 and anti-CTLA-4 [5], with many patients deriving long-term clinical benefit [1, 3, 6]. However, these durable responses still occur only in a fraction of patients and can be associated with significant toxicity, particularly when used in combination. In this review, we focus on our current understanding of the mechanism of action of immunotherapy and on biomarkers

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to select patients for treatment on clinical trials and for particular therapies in the clinic.

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The stages of neoplastic transformation and associated molecular alterations have been well described for melanoma [7–9], yet complex tumoral/stromal/immune interactions result in tumor heterogeneity that is evident in patients with the same histological signatures as well as between tumors within the same patient and even within different areas of a single tumor [10–12]. The mechanisms fundamental to CPI and specifically to anti-PD-1/PD-L1 activity in a varied and often complex tumor microenvironment (TME) have led to the identification of a multifactorial process dependent on the interactions of specific cell types with diverse functions.

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This article is part of the Topical Collection on *Melanoma*

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Current Understanding of the Mechanism(s) of Action of PD-1 Check Point Inhibitors

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Tumor immunogenicity or the ability of the tumor to trigger a productive immune response is arguably fundamental to all effective anti-cancer therapies, including some chemo/radio therapies and targeted therapies but especially immunotherapies. While melanoma is widely recognized as an immunogenic tumor overall, great variability in immunogenicity is evident during disease progression and between patients or even lesions, which may shed light on the effectiveness of anti-PD-1 therapies [13]. Ultraviolet radiation coupled with key molecular changes which are the primary drivers in the

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57 malignant transformation of melanocytes often produces an
58 exceptionally high rate of somatic mutations [7, 14]. These
59 mutations which promote tumorigenesis by coordinated dys-
60 regulation of cellular processes are also central to its immuno-
61 genicity with the emergence of neoantigens, as well as in-
62 creased cancer/testis or differentiation antigens [15].
63 Importantly, immunogenicity is not static; indeed, co-
64 evolution of the immune system with the tumor initiates be-
65 fore neoplastic transformation. Immune pressure either elimi-
66 nates developing tumors or steers them towards an equilibri-
67 um and ultimately to tumor escape by immune evasion as well
68 as by direct and indirect subversion of the immune response
69 itself [16, 17]. The process of immunoediting highlights not
70 only the dynamic nature of immunogenicity but also provides
71 insight into the complexity and evolving spatial/temporal in-
72 terplay between the tumor and immune response, which lies at
73 the heart of the effectiveness of CPI immunotherapy.

74 Activated lymphocytes including NK and T cells transiently
75 express PD-1 on their cell surface, which in the melanoma
76 setting may represent recently engaged tumor-specific T cells.
77 Significantly, translational analysis of adoptive cellular thera-
78 py patients has identified that PD-1+ rather than PD-1- CD8+
79 tumor infiltrating lymphocytes (TIL) conferred superior
80 oligoclonal expansion of tumor-reactive TCR β clonotypes,
81 suggesting that PD-1 expression may mark a population of
82 anti-tumor CTL [18]. However, chronic TCR signaling can
83 lead to sustained PD-1 expression and the triggering of im-
84 mune adaptation, a physiological reaction to curb an inappro-
85 priate or autoimmune response that can be usurped by tumor
86 cells to promote peripheral tolerance. Sustained PD-1 expres-
87 sion along with increasing co-expression of additional
88 markers such as CTLA-4, TIM-3, LAG-3, TIGIT, and
89 VISTA denotes the transition from an activated effector
90 (Teff) to an exhausted T cell (Tex). In a typical melanoma
91 setting replete with chronic antigen stimulation, T cells tend
92 to exist on a continuum that ranges from a state of stemness
93 towards dysfunction with effector or memory-like states being
94 key intermediates. Identification and interrogation of these
95 progressively differentiating T cell subsets are paramount to
96 appreciating an effective anti-PD-1 therapy [19, 20].

97 The use of a single or limited set of markers is likely to be
98 inaccurate in discriminating between transitioning immune
99 populations as some markers such as PD-1 are shared between
100 immune subsets. Instead, linked functional characteristics can
101 more readily delineate these discrete intratumoral states with a
102 transition from high levels of cytotoxic molecules
103 (granzymes/perforin) and effector cytokines (Interferons, IL-
104 2, IL-12, and TNF), a high proliferative capacity and anabolic
105 metabolism associated with an effector subset to limited or
106 absent cytotoxic/effector molecules, low proliferative capaci-
107 ty, and catabolic metabolism associated with dysfunctional or
108 highly exhausted T cells [21]. Additionally, specific transcrip-
109 tion factors, gene expression profiles, and epigenetic

signatures yield an even finer picture of these subsets while
providing insight into their respective functions [19]. T-bet, a
transcription factor associated with Th1-biased response, clas-
sically associated with Teff cells also plays a role in Tex cells
[22]. The transcription factors NR4A, EOMES, and TOX all
have been associated with a Tex lineage while TCF1 addition-
ally drives a stem-like progenitor lineage capable of self-re-
newal, while seeding Teff cells and memory T cells (Tmem)
cells [19, 23, 24]. Recent advances in transcriptomic (scRNA-
seq) and epigenetic (ATAC-seq) analyses effects of anti-PD-1
blockade have identified gene and epigenetic signatures asso-
ciated with these subsets along with their key regulators [25*,
26].

Understanding the functional role that these discrete T cell
populations play during PD-1 blockade continues to be a high
priority with the initial focus being on exhausted T cells.
Interestingly, a high frequency of tumor infiltrating CD8+ T
cells expressing PD-1+/CTLA-4+, a subset of exhausted T
cells is highly predictive of anti-PD-1 CPI response in meta-
static melanoma patients [27*, 28]. Conversely, a low
intratumoral frequency of these Tex cells exhibited a negative
predictive value with single-agent anti-PD1 therapy yet this
low frequency was not associated with poor outcomes in pa-
tients treated with combination anti-CTLA-4 and anti-PD-1,
suggesting a non-redundant mechanism with the combination
CPI [28]. Similarly, circulating peripheral Tex cells (PD-1+/
CTLA-4+ CD8+ T cells) were found to be “reinvigorated”
during anti-PD-1 therapy of melanoma, which was associated
with a positive clinical outcome particularly in patients with a
larger ratio of proliferating Tex cells to tumor burden, defined
as the sum of the long axis of all measurable lesions reported
on the pre-therapy imaging reports [29*]. While these studies
suggest that tumor-reactive Tex are a major target of PD-1 CPI
with functional roles both in the TME and systemically, a
chronic LCMV model demonstrated that the anti-PD-1 rein-
vigorated is transient, and exhaustion persists shortly after
PD-1 CPI treatment due to a stable epigenetic signature
[25*,30]. This functional maintenance of exhaustion may ac-
count for the narrow proliferative burst of Tex when on treat-
ment and clarify its relationship with tumor burden; beyond
the clear prognostic consideration, a larger tumor burden can
more easily withstand the effector response associated with a
transient proliferative burst while readily providing chronic
antigenic stimulation in addition to PD-L1 or other inhibitory
immune signals in the TME required to maintain T cell ex-
haustion. The dysfunctional state associated with Tex epige-
netic program, particularly in the Eomes^{hi}PD-1^{hi} subset, is
unable to sustain a memory-like response with PD-1 block-
ade, which is critical for effective tumor immunity and re-
mains distinct from naïve T cells (Tnaive), Teff, and Tmem
cells [25*, 26]. The fate of Tex cells underscores that while
exhausted T cells can be useful to predict response and can
certainly contribute to the efficacy of PD-1 blockade when

163 tumor burden is low or if PD-1 blockade occurs before
 164 reaching a late dysfunctional state, immune subsets capable
 165 of self-renewal and persistence in the presence of chronic
 166 antigen are likely required for sustained responses.

167 The necessary role of Teff cells in a productive anti-tumor
 168 immune response has been well documented but the cell types
 169 that maintain this pool of effectors while enabling memory-
 170 like subsets continue to be defined. Expression of the tran-
 171 scription factor TCF-1 in T cells has identified a self-
 172 renewing precursor population critical for response to immu-
 173 notherapy both in preclinical models and in patients with mel-
 174 anoma [31, 32]. In a chronic LCMV model, IL-12 or other
 175 inflammatory mediators could blunt TCF-1 expression via
 176 STAT-4, allowing for the differentiation of KLRG1+ Teff
 177 [33]. However, TCF-1 in a PD-1-dependent fashion could
 178 suppress TCF-1- T-bet+/KLRG1+ Teff differentiation while
 179 establishing a CD8+ Eomes+ Tex precursor population [24].
 180 The factors underlying the generation, maintenance, or fate
 181 choices of these stem-like TCF-1+ T cells are actively being
 182 investigated. A recent study has revealed that the metabolic
 183 state of the TME, specifically elevated extracellular potassium
 184 which induces a starvation response/autophagy and catabolic
 185 metabolism, promotes stem cell-like TCF-1 expressing T cells
 186 via an epigenetic-dependent stemness-associated program
 187 [21].

188 Other studies have demonstrated innate immune mecha-
 189 nisms that can also be instrumental in effective CPI therapies.
 190 PD-1 is expressed on natural killer (NK) cells and when en-
 191 gaged with PD-L1 can limit NK cytotoxicity. In tumors with
 192 loss of MHC class I, rejection was dependent on these innate
 193 effectors which was significantly enhanced with PD-1 block-
 194 ade [34]. Even in models where CD8+ T cells routinely me-
 195 diate tumor regression, PD-1+ NK cells demonstrated a mean-
 196 ingful contribution to anti-PD-1 therapy with notable selection
 197 of PD-L1+ tumor cells [34]. Further, NK cells were shown to
 198 play a significant role in the efficacy of PD-1 blockade in
 199 melanoma by producing the cytokine FLT3L and forming
 200 stable conjugates with CD141+ cDC1, resulting in increased
 201 frequencies of the DCs [35]. Similarly, cDC1 subsets were
 202 shown to play an additional key role in the efficacy of PD-1
 203 blockade by producing IL-12, triggering IFN- γ secretion from
 204 PD-1+ T cells, which further engaged IL-12 secretion from
 205 DCs. The resulting IL-12/IFN- γ feed-forward loop which ini-
 206 tiated with anti-PD-1 treatment helped further license these
 207 PD-1+ T cells and enhance PD-1 blockade [36]. A separate
 208 study demonstrated the role of benefit in PD-1 blockade of
 209 PD-1+ on CD103+ DCs that engage and activate intratumoral
 210 T cells via production of CXCL9/CXCL10 [37]. Conversely,
 211 increased oncogenic, β -catenin signaling in TME leads to
 212 downregulation of CCL4, which blunts the frequency of a
 213 similar subset of DCs, ultimately limiting T cell recruitment
 214 [38, 39]. Beyond NK and DC subsets, PD-1+ tumor-
 215 associated macrophages (TAM) with an M2-like phenotype,

which generally are associated with poor patient outcomes, 216
 can contribute to anti-tumor immunity via tumor phagocytosis 217
 when in the presence of anti-PD-1 in combination with other 218
 therapeutics like anti-CSFR1 or anti-SIRP α blocking antibod- 219
 ies [40, 41]. 220

221 The mechanisms fundamental to CPI and specifically anti-
 222 PD-1/PD-L1 activity in a varied and often complex tumor
 223 microenvironment (TME) have led to the identification of a
 224 multifactorial process dependent on the interactions of specifi-
 225 c cell types with diverse functions. While this complexity can
 226 pose a challenge to identify the relevant parameter(s) specific
 227 for a given patient or even a specific lesion, many of these
 228 seemingly distinct mechanisms converge on the TME with
 229 specific immune subsets driving a collective immunogenicity
 230 in turn creating a foundation for effective anti-PD-1 therapy.

Biomarkers of Response to CPI 231

PD-L1 Expression 232

233 Following the discovery of PD-1 expression on lymphocytes
 234 [42], the B7 family member, B7-H1, was identified as the
 235 ligand for PD-1 [43]. This protein, called B7-H1, was identi-
 236 fied by Dong et al. based on its similarity to the co-stimulatory
 237 ligands B7-1 and B7-2 on immune cells [44]. Ligation of this
 238 protein in the context of antigen binding on T cells caused IL-
 239 10 secretion. The pattern of expression of B7-H1 in malignant
 240 neoplasms such as melanoma was very interesting. Notably,
 241 B7-H1 was strongly co-localized with tumor infiltrating lym-
 242 phocytes [45]. In addition, interferon- γ was found at the in-
 243 terface of B7-H1 expressing tumor cells and TILs. In this
 244 same study, B7-H1 (now more commonly referred to as PD-
 245 L1) was also found to be a prognostic marker, predicting ex-
 246 tended survival. When tumor tissue was analyzed in patients
 247 treated with the PD-1 blocking antibody, nivolumab, PD-L1
 248 expression was found to correlate with response [46]. A simi-
 249 lar observation was made with the PD-L1 antibody,
 250 atezolizumab, in a phase I multiple solid tumor trial [47].
 251 These observations were confirmed with pembrolizumab
 252 [48].

253 Given the clinical and translational data supporting the use
 254 of PD-L1 as a biomarker for response to PD-1 blockade, many
 255 recent trials have explored this prospectively and retrospec-
 256 tively. In a retrospective analysis of patients treated on the
 257 Keynote 001 trial, tumors from 451 patients (out of 655 pa-
 258 tients treated) were stained with the 22C3 monoclonal anti-
 259 body [48]. Samples were assessed by a quantitative membra-
 260 nous staining called the MEL score which incorporated inten-
 261 sity and frequency of staining on tumor and tumor adjacent
 262 stromal and immune cells. A positive score was anyone with
 263 MEL ≥ 2 (staining in $\geq 1\%$ of cells). Of the 451 patients eval-
 264 uated, 344 (76%) had PD-L1-positive tumors. A higher MEL
 265 score was associated with a higher response rate and longer

266 PFS (hazard ratio, 0.76; 95% CI, 0.71 to 0.82) and OS (hazard
 267 ratio, 0.76; 95% CI, 0.69 to 0.83) ($P < .001$ for each). The
 268 objective response rate was 8% for MEL 0 and ranged up to
 269 57% for MEL 4 showing the dynamic range of this marker. In
 270 a prospective nivolumab vs dacarbazine clinical trial [49],
 271 using the rabbit monoclonal 28-8 antibody, 5% or greater tu-
 272 mor cell staining was considered “positive” [50] with 2 pa-
 273 thologists independently scoring using an automated Dako
 274 stainer. In the PD-L1-positive group, 52.7% had an objective
 275 response to nivolumab versus 33.1% in the PD-L1-negative
 276 group. Other trials in melanoma have consistently shown a
 277 higher response rate and higher PFS (and in some cases a
 278 higher OS) in PD-L1 high patients [6, 51–53]. Some of the
 279 questions that remain with PD-L1 IHC have to do with the
 280 difference between tumor and/or stroma and different mono-
 281 clonal antibodies although recent data has shown that most
 282 widely used PD-L1 monoclonal antibodies are quite consis-
 283 tent, reproducible, and inter-comparable regardless of the spe-
 284 cific methodology used in the hands of trained experienced
 285 pathologists using recent rapidly processed specimens [54].
 286 Also, PD-L1 expression has differing predictive value in ma-
 287 lignancies arising from differing sites. In non-small cell lung
 288 cancer, in the Keynote 001 clinical trial, the response rate of
 289 pembrolizumab varied from 8.1% in the < 1% PD-L1 group to
 290 29.6% in the PD-L1 50–74% group [55]. In Keynote 010,
 291 where chemo-naïve patients were randomized to
 292 pembrolizumab at 2 mg/kg or 10 mg/kg (or docetaxel), PD-
 293 L1 staining of 1–49% was associated with a response rate of
 294 10% while $\geq 50\%$ PD-L1 had a response rate of 30% (all for
 295 the pembrolizumab cohort). Contrast these findings to
 296 nivolumab in renal cell cancer in the Checkmate 025 study
 297 where PD-L1 expression was not found to significantly pre-
 298 dict benefit from PD-1 blockade (< 1%, OS was 27.4 months
 299 while PD-L1 $\geq 1\%$, OS was 21.8 months). Similar results
 300 were seen in Keynote 427, which examined first line
 301 pembrolizumab in renal cell cancer; no difference in response
 302 rate with PD-L1 expression [56].

303 **Immune Cell Infiltration and “Exhausted” T (Tex) Cells**
 304 **in the Tumor Microenvironment**

305 Tumor infiltrating lymphocytes (TIL) have been shown to
 306 correlate with prognosis in melanoma (as well as in many
 307 other tumor types) [57–59]. An important study, by Tumeh
 308 et al., showed that CD8+ TIL density in tumor samples was
 309 higher in responding patients than in patients with disease
 310 progression [60]. Subsequently, it was demonstrated that
 311 CD8+ cells with dual PD-1/CTLA4 expression, or
 312 “exhausted” CD8+ cells, were predictive of PD-1 monother-
 313 apy response in melanoma [27]. Furthermore, lower levels of
 314 “exhausted” CD8+ cells were associated with response to dual
 315 PD-1/CTLA4 inhibitor therapy but were insufficient for
 316 monotherapy PD-1 blockade [28]. Another important study

by Broz et al. showed that the presence of cDC1 dendritic 317
 cells in melanoma was predictive of response [61]. These 318
 findings have been extended by Spranger et al. who showed 319
 that BATF + dendritic cells are characteristic of immune infil- 320
 trated melanoma [62]. More recently, the Krummel group 321
 demonstrated that there are 2 axes in “immunogenic” tumors, 322
 one a NK-cDC1 axis [35] that operates in checkpoint respon- 323
 sive tumors and a CD4-cDC2 axis [63]. Other axes may op- 324
 erate in other tumor types as well. 325

Recent translational studies have shed light on the biology, 326
 location, and surroundings of Tex cells. Tex have a distinctive 327
 transcriptional profile that is maintained stably via large-scale 328
 epigenetic programming and transcription factors [25, 30]. 329
 The presence of Tex cells in tumors can predict responses once 330
 tumor burden is factored in [29]. Thommen et al. reported 331
 that these cells produce chemokines that attract B cells and 332
 TFH cells that produce tertiary lymphoid structures [64]. 333
 More recently, the transcription factor Tox, highly expressed 334
 in exhausted T cells, appears to be critical to maintain their 335
 tissue presence but not the dysfunction associated with them 336
 [65–67]. There remain unanswered questions about precursor 337
 and terminal exhausted T cells and the transitions possible 338
 between these states [68]. 339

340 **Tumor Mutation Burden and MSI**

Tumors with high mutation burdens appear to have an in- 341
 creased response rate and better survival in response to PD-1 342
 immunotherapy [69]. In non-small cell lung cancer, a higher 343
 non-synonymous mutation burden was associated with better 344
 PFS, OS, and objective response when treated with anti-PD-1 345
 [70]. While some neoantigens are clonal (shared by multiple 346
 sites), others are present in a more localized fashion (branch). 347
 It has been hypothesized that because of the selection pressure 348
 that neoantigen-directed T cells put on tumor cells, that non- 349
 clonal neoantigen bearing tumor cells could be edited out 350
 while clonal neoantigens persist and can predict for greater 351
 response to PD-1 inhibitors [71]. The use of tumor mutation 352
 burden to select patients for PD-1 therapy has not yielded 353
 consistent results and at present is experimental [72]. These 354
 studies need additional replication to be widely accepted. At 355
 present, it is unclear how tumor mutation burden impacts mel- 356
 anoma although it has been noted that uveal melanoma, which 357
 has a low tumor mutation burden has a low response rate to 358
 PD-1 blockade [73, 74]. 359

Extremely high rates of tumor mutation burden are seen in 360
 patients with mismatch repair deficiency [75]. These tumors 361
 also have a very high response rate to PD-1 immunotherapy 362
 [76, 77] and anti-PD-1 therapy is approved for use in these 363
 patients regardless of primary site. Widespread and continual 364
 mutation resulting from a deficiency in DNA repair is thought 365
 to generate neoantigens which in turn prime T cells [78]. 366
 While melanoma is not part of Lynch syndrome and mismatch 367

368 repair deficiency is uncommon in melanoma, desmoplastic
 369 melanoma, which can have a high UV mutagenesis signature,
 370 is also associated with a high response rate to anti-PD-1 ther-
 371 apy [79, 80]. Basal cell cancer of the skin is the most mutated
 372 non-mismatch repair deficient cancer [81]. Squamous cell
 373 cancer of the skin also has a very high mutation burden [82].
 374 Squamous cell cancers respond well to PD-1 blockade, while
 375 response rates for basal cell cancers are lower [83, 84]. Merkel
 376 Cell Cancer, an uncommon skin neoplasm, also responds to
 377 PD-1 blockade regardless of polyoma viral status [85] al-
 378 though only the merkel cell polyoma virus negative tumors
 379 have a high mutation burden, presumably due to UV damage
 380 [86]. These data illustrate the complexity of this field and the
 381 continuing research into the impact mutation burden has on
 382 PD-1 response.

383 **Peripheral Blood Biomarkers**

384 There is great interest in identifying peripheral blood bio-
 385 markers associated with favorable response to immunothera-
 386 py in melanoma, as these could be serially collected and offer
 387 significant safety, cost, and convenience advantages.
 388 Peripheral biomarkers could also allow for profiling of the
 389 systemic immune response in a way that tumor biopsies
 390 cannot.

391 Since basic peripheral blood laboratory variables are col-
 392 lected routinely in standard clinical care, it is possible to study
 393 these variables in large retrospective clinical studies. For ex-
 394 ample, Martens et al. analyzed peripheral blood biomarkers of
 395 209 patients with advanced melanoma on ipilimumab. They
 396 found that a baseline signature of low lactate dehydrogenase
 397 (LDH), absolute monocyte count (AMC), and myeloid-
 398 derived suppressor cells (MDSC), as well as high absolute
 399 eosinophil count (AEC), regulatory T cells, and relative lym-
 400 phocyte count (RLC) were associated with improved out-
 401 comes with ipilimumab therapy [87]. Similarly, Weide et al.
 402 analyzed peripheral blood biomarkers of patients with ad-
 403 vanced melanoma treated with pembrolizumab and found that
 404 high relative eosinophil count (REC), high relative lympho-
 405 cyte count (RLC), low LDH, and absence of metastasis other
 406 than soft-tissue/lung metastases are independent baseline
 407 characteristics associated with favorable overall survival
 408 [88]. Most recently, Rosner et al. evaluated peripheral blood
 409 clinical laboratory variables associated with outcomes follow-
 410 ing combination nivolumab and ipilimumab immunotherapy
 411 in melanoma. They found that significant independent vari-
 412 ables for favorable OS included the following: high relative
 413 eosinophils, high relative basophils, low absolute monocytes,
 414 low LDH, and a low neutrophil-to-lymphocyte ratio [89].
 415 Further work is needed to validate these peripheral blood bio-
 416 markers in randomized controlled clinical trials. Ultimately,
 417 such biomarkers could be a simple and cost-effective way to

define which patients with metastatic melanoma may derive 418
 the most benefit from immunotherapy. 419

Immunotherapy and the Microbiome 420

Complex microbial communities, known as the microbiota, 421
 colonize the mammalian host and contribute to the health of 422
 the host [90]. Over the last few decades, there has been in- 423
 creasing evidence to suggest that the bacterial microbiome 424
 plays an important role in carcinogenesis as well as the body's 425
 response to cancer treatment [91] [92]. While CPI therapy has 426
 revolutionized the treatment of metastatic melanoma, re- 427
 sponse to CPI therapy is variable, with some patients achieve 428
 a robust response while other patients have minimal or no 429
 response. One hypothesis that has emerged recently is that 430
 the gut microbiome may affect response to CPI therapy, and 431
 thus the study of the gut microbiome can yield important clues 432
 about which patients will derive the most benefit from 433
 immunotherapy. 434

There is evidence in mouse models that modulation of the 435
 gut microbiome may enhance responses to immune check- 436
 point blockade, so several groups have studied whether the 437
 human microbiome affects response to CPI therapy. In a study 438
 by Gopalakrishnan et al., the authors examined the oral and 439
 gut microbiome of 112 melanoma patients undergoing anti- 440
 PD-1 immunotherapy [93]. The authors observed significant 441
 differences in the diversity and composition of the gut, but not 442
 oral, microbiome of patients who responded to PD-1 therapy 443
 versus those patients who did not respond, namely responders 444
 had higher alpha diversity ($P < 0.01$), relative abundance of 445
 bacteria of the Ruminococcaceae family ($P < 0.01$), and 446
 showed significantly higher alpha diversity ($P < 0.01$) and re- 447
 lative abundance of bacteria of the Ruminococcaceae family 448
 ($P < 0.01$) in responding patients. In a similar study analyzing 449
 the stool microbiota before and after anti-PD-1 therapy, 450
 Matson et al. showed that patients who responded to anti- 451
 PD-1 therapy had an abundance of certain bacteria, including 452
Bifidobacterium longum, *Collinsella aerofaciens*, and 453
Enterococcus faecium compared with non-responders [94]. 454
 One hypothesis is that the increased bacterial diversity in some 455
 patients leads to increased immune cell infiltration. Wargo 456
 et al. performed immune profiling of stool samples from mel- 457
 anoma patients and demonstrated increased tumor immune 458
 infiltrates in responding patients, with a higher density of 459
 CD8+ T cells which correlated with abundance of specific 460
 bacteria enriched in the gut microbiome [95]. Together, these 461
 studies suggest that the commensal microbiome of patients 462
 may have a mechanistic impact on anti-tumor immunity. 463
 Further studies are needed to better understand the precise 464
 mechanisms mediating this effect, and specifically to deter- 465
 mine whether there are ways to modulate the microbiome to 466
 affect response to treatment. 467

468 Aside from the ways in which the gut microbiome affects
 469 response to therapy, another interesting observation is that the
 470 gut microbiome may influence which patients are most at risk
 471 for checkpoint blockade-induced colitis. In a prospective
 472 study of patients with metastatic melanoma undergoing
 473 ipilimumab treatment, authors correlated the pre-
 474 inflammation fecal microbiota and microbiome composition
 475 with subsequent development of colitis [96]. They observed
 476 that patients with a paucity of bacteria involved in polyamine
 477 transport and B vitamin biosynthesis was associated with an
 478 increased risk of colitis, whereas patients with increased rep-
 479 resentation of bacteria in the Bacteroidetes phylum were more
 480 resistant to the development of colitis.

481 **Conclusions**

482 Recently, we have seen a rapid increase in our understanding
 483 of the mechanism of action of CPI. Melanoma has served as a
 484 model system for many functional and analytical studies.
 485 While some of these laboratory advances have translated into
 486 clinical and translational studies, in many instances, the com-
 487 plexity of the immune response to tumor has stymied attempts
 488 to develop markers that accurately and comprehensively pro-
 489 file the immune response to tumor. While it is unlikely that a
 490 single biomarker or a simple combination of biomarkers can
 491 provide the profile we need as clinicians and translational
 492 researchers, rapid advances are underway and we expect some
 493 of these advances to translate into trial and clinical use.

494 **Compliance with Ethical Standards**

495 **Conflict of Interest** Christopher G. Twitty declares that he has no con-
 496 flict of interest. Laura A. Huppert declares that she has no conflict of
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499 **Human and Animal Rights and Informed Consent** This article does not
 500 contain any studies with human or animal subjects performed by any of
 501 the authors.

502 **References**

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 504 highlighted as:

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