

# Congress Interview

Michael A. Postow has made significant contributions to the landscape of immunotherapy and its applications in combating melanoma. His insights and expertise are highly sought after by medical professionals and researchers alike. He spoke with AMJ during the 2024 American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) Annual Meeting on his groundbreaking work and on ASCO 2024.



**Michael A. Postow**

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**Q1** Could you share some insights into the groundbreaking research and development process behind FDA-approved therapies for melanoma that your team at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSK) has contributed to, such as the nivolumab and ipilimumab combination?

Immunotherapy with drugs like nivolumab and ipilimumab has been decades in the making, even long before our group at MSK was involved. The science that laid the foundation for these approaches began with early investigations into how T cells worked, and this then led to testing this approach in mice and ultimately in patients. It is remarkable to have been a part of even one small component of this story (the later phase clinical trials that showed it was very effective in melanoma), and I'm personally grateful for all of the scientists, mentors, and colleagues in the biopharmaceutical industry who helped these treatments become

a reality. We now need to work on improving the efficacy of these approaches and finding options for patients for whom drugs like nivolumab and ipilimumab do not work, so that everyone can benefit from our melanoma treatments.

**Q2** Your dedication to expanding the portfolio of melanoma treatments is evident. Can you elaborate on any ongoing efforts or future directions you see in the field that excite you the most?

Tumor-infiltrating lymphocyte therapy has been the remarkable advance of 2024 regarding melanoma. This approach involves removing a tumor surgically and then expanding the lymphocytes within the tumor in a laboratory for ultimate re-infusion back into patients to treat the rest of their melanoma. While this approach is difficult and not suitable for every patient, it offers the potential for long-term benefits. While one approach, lifileucel, is now FDA

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approved, we are only at the beginning of realizing the full potential of cellular therapy for melanoma.

**Q3** Building trusting relationships with patients seems to be a cornerstone of your practice. How do you approach crafting personalized treatment plans, and how do you ensure patients feel supported throughout their journey?

It's important to first get to know my patients personally, their families, and what is important to them in life, not just about their melanoma treatment. Once I understand who a person is beyond their diagnosis, then I feel more comfortable recommending a treatment approach and helping patients through their journey. I have met some remarkable people in all walks

of life with so many varied interests; I learn so much from my patients every day.

**Q4** What sessions are you most looking forward to attending whilst here at ASCO 2024, and why?

The ASCO Plenary Session is a collection of the most important updates in oncology in 2024. We are fortunate this year to have a melanoma study, called the NADINA study, represented in this session. The NADINA study demonstrated the promise of pre-surgical (neoadjuvant) treatment with the nivolumab and ipilimumab combination over surgery, followed by adjuvant immunotherapy. In combination with other neoadjuvant data, I feel this affirms the role neoadjuvant immunotherapy has in our field

and opens up many future opportunities for further exploration.

**Q5** Balancing a demanding professional role with personal interests can be challenging. How do you manage your time effectively between your responsibilities at MSK and your pursuits outside of work?

I have two young children (3 and 5 years old) and a wonderful wife. Every night I'm home, I prioritize reading books to my kids at bedtime, telling them stories, and putting them to sleep. This time helps keep me grounded in the most important aspects of life and enjoying the little moments. No matter how busy life gets, I believe you can always find time for whatever is important.