

## Cancer Advances: Vaccine After Surgery May Help Patients With Advanced Melanoma Live Longer

From the December 1, 2002 issue of the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* For several years, researchers have been developing new cancer treatments that work by triggering the body's own immune system to attack cancer cells. These treatments, often called therapeutic vaccines, have been shown to be especially promising against melanoma, the most aggressive form of skin cancer. Now a new study by researchers at the John Wayne Cancer Institute in Santa Monica, California, has suggested that a therapeutic vaccine called Canvaxin may help patients with the most advanced stages of melanoma live longer. This finding is important because patients whose melanoma has spread throughout the body, or become metastatic, have few available treatment options. Led by Dr. Donald L. Morton, researchers examined data on 150 patients with metastatic melanoma who participated in earlier clinical trials. All of the patients received Canvaxin after having their detectable tumors surgically removed. The researchers then compared these patients to another group who had only surgery, without the vaccine. The study found that patients who received Canvaxin lived about twice as long as those who had surgery alone, and were about twice as likely to survive for more than five years after starting their therapy. However, the researchers stressed that the study's findings should be taken with caution. Since the study was not randomized, and because it used data from earlier clinical trials, much more research must be completed before the results can be confirmed. **What Does This Mean For Patients?** According to Dr. Morton, the findings of this study are potentially important for many patients who suffer from metastatic melanoma. He noted that a phase III clinical trial of the vaccine is already underway in the United States, Europe, and Australia, in an attempt to confirm the new findings. People interested in learning more about clinical trials of Canvaxin should talk with their doctor.