Bertil Damato, MD, PhD, an internationally renowned ocular oncologist and director of the UCSF Ocular Oncology Clinic, is optimistic, however. “Advances in genetic profiling of intraocular melanomas have enabled us to offer more accurate prognostication and work more effectively with patients, families and referring physicians,” says Damato.

The clinic, one of only a few such specialty centers in the world, has experience in the evaluation and treatment of the full range of eye tumors, including:

- Intraocular melanomas, metastases and a variety of benign lesions
- Conjunctival melanomas and carcinomas on the ocular surface
- Retinoblastomas, which present in babies

“High-quality patient care requires a multidisciplinary team that includes ocular oncologists, radiologists, oncologists, oncology nurses and geneticists – as well as specialized equipment,” says Damato. He notes, for example, that the UCSF clinic is one of the most experienced services delivering proton beam radiotherapy for intraocular melanoma.

“Genotyping Improves Prognosis, Management”

Precise tumor characterization is the key to personalized patient care. While many physicians rely on the tumor-node-metastasis (TNM) staging system, Damato and his colleagues have developed and refined a precision medicine approach, which the UCSF clinic now offers routinely.

“Consider that a next-generation sequencing approach developed by Boris Bastian, MD, PhD, UCSF professor of Pathology and Dermatology, can test more than 500 important genes in very small samples from uveal melanomas,” says Damato. Damato and his colleagues have also developed a method for estimating when metastases from intraocular melanoma will occur and the likely survival time for individual patients by combining clinical stage, histological grade, genetic tumor type, age and gender.

All of this offers a number of advantages:

- Patients who have melanomas with no metastatic potential can expect near-normal life expectancy.
- Patients with melanomas that have known metastatic potential do not have to wrestle with an uncertain prognosis. Quality-of-life studies that Damato completed in England found that uncertain prognosis is more stressful than a poor prognosis.
- Carefully selected patients can enroll in emerging clinical trials that aim to personalize treatments, some of which are now available at UCSF.

Tailoring Education and Support Services

Personalized prognostication also improves education and support services that help patients cope with the stress of their illness. At UCSF, patients are routinely referred to a psychologist to ensure holistic care. Damato also records consultations on his iPad and securely emails them to patients so they can replay a conversation that might have been difficult to digest when receiving bad news. “Patients deserve access to all available information about their disease and course of treatment,” says Damato.

For more information about the Ocular Oncology Clinic, visit www.ucsfhealth.org/ocularoncology.
Ocular Oncology Clinic

Specializing in the diagnosis and treatment of tumors that affect the eye, the clinic is led by internationally renowned ophthalmologist Bertil Damato, MD, PhD. Dr. Damato has treated thousands of patients from around the world with all types of ocular tumors, including more than 4,000 patients with intraocular melanoma, the most common form of eye cancer.

Our clinic:

- Is one of the only centers on the West Coast offering proton beam radiotherapy, the gold standard of treatment for most patients with intraocular melanomas.
- Has treated more than 1,500 ocular melanoma patients with proton therapy since 1978.
- Is at the forefront of research on ocular melanoma and proton therapy.