

The Early Detection and Treatment of Skin Cancer by General Practitioners in Australia

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Background

- At least 2 in 3 Australians will develop skin cancer before the age of 70.¹
- Skin cancers are the most common cancer managed by general practitioners (GPs).²
- GPs in Australia currently have over one million patient encounters per year for skin cancers.^{2,3}
- SunSmart have identified Health Professionals (including GPs, relevant practice staff and other allied health professionals) as having key roles in advising patients to adopt preventative measures and to regularly monitor their skin to notice changes.

1. Staples MP, Elwood M, Burton RC, Williams JL, Marks R, Giles GG. Non-melanoma skin cancer in Australia: the 2002 national survey and trends since 1985. *Medical Journal of Australia* 2006; 184(1): 6-10.
2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) & Australasian Association of Cancer Registries (AACR). *Cancer in Australia 2001*. AIHW cat.no. CAN 23. AIHW:Canberra2004. Available from: www.aihw.gov.au.
3. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). *Non-melanoma skin cancer: general practice consultations, hospitalisation and mortality*. Cancer series no. 43. Cat no. 39. AIHW:Canberra2009.

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Interventions

- Melanoma workshops (12) were held reaching over 350 Victorian GP's. Evaluation of knowledge immediately after workshops.
- A DVD on skin cancer diagnosis, investigation, management and screening was developed.
- A 6 hour (3 x 2 hour) Online Active Learning Module (ALM) about UV, vitamin D and skin cancer was developed. 1209 completions of module, 2470 enrolments. Evaluation immediately upon completion, and 6 months after completion to evaluate changes in practice.
- A 1 hour educational activity about skin cancer prevention, vitamin D and early detection was developed. 6138 views.
- A 10 minute video featuring expert opinions on balancing vitamin D and sun protection messages in general practice was developed. 3664 views.
- Education workshops (4) were held with pharmacy assistants to promote correct use of sunscreen and vitamin D advice.
- A pilot 4hr workshop was delivered to International Medical Graduates (IMG's) with a focus on melanoma and GPs role in screening.³ further workshops were conducted.
- Two cancer prevention workshops for practice nurses that included content on skin cancer prevention, early detection and vitamin D were held.
- Tailored resources were developed specifically for GPs.
- Web page and supporting resources developed on a specific page of SunSmart website tailored for health professionals.
- A survey of Victorian GP's was conducted to determine the knowledge, attitudes and self-reported practices of Victorian GPs with regards to vitamin D, skin cancer prevention and sun protection advice. This was repeated again in 2015.

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Key Learnings & Implications

- Reported increases to GP confidence and changes to practice as a result of ALM.
- Areas for improvement; biopsy techniques, identifying lesions.
- Possible further investigation recommended to review actual skin checks, pathology, vitamin D testing, preventative advice.
- 2011 Survey results demonstrated that a high percentage of Victorian GP's are regularly providing advice on both sun exposure and sun protection, while regularly testing patients to determine vitamin D status, and also managing cases of vitamin D deficiency.
- The survey did reveal some inconsistencies between the advice GP's reported giving patients and the current vitamin D recommendations regarding sun exposure and sun protection. In general, it showed GP's expressed greater concern about vitamin D deficiency than skin cancer and further education may be warranted on the difference between UV levels and temperature and how UV levels vary across seasons as it appears that an emphasis on year-round sun protection is still adopted by many GP's.
- The research provided a clear opportunity to develop a set of resources that specifically cater to the unique position of GPs and communicate the often complicated information about sun protection and sun exposure in a clear and concise manner. A mailout was conducted to all (1710) Victorian GP practices in 2012 with a range of resources for the GP sector.
- Analysis will now begin on 2015 survey results to determine changes between 2011 and 2015.

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