

Behavior and knowledge of Hungarian medical students concerning photoprotection: results from an online survey and from the Euromelanoma screening campaign

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Cumulative ultraviolet light (UV) exposure and history of sunburn are important risk factors for skin cancer development. It has been proven, that the use of appropriate photoprotection can prevent skin cancer. Previous studies showed, that both physicians' and medical students' sun protection habits are suboptimal and they likely "preach water but drink wine".

Our aim was to survey our medical students concerning their photoprotection habits and knowledge about UV light and to screen their skin during the pan-European campaign for skin cancer prevention.

Between September 2012 and January 2013 an online questionnaire was submitted to the Hungarian medical students at the University of Szeged. The questionnaire consisted of twenty questions asking the study participants about their demographic characteristics, family anamnesis, photoprotection habits, tanning behavior and awareness of UV light. The other part of the study was carried out during the "Euromelanoma Day" in May 2013, where we screened medical students with the standard questionnaire and physical examination.

Of the 380 students who participated in the online survey, 70.7% were female. 63.7% had fair skin (Fitzpatrick skin type I-III) and 11.8% reported having a family history of skin cancer. 61.8% of the students received sunburn during the past summer; half of them were severe and blistering. Regular sunscreen use during sunbathing was reported by 67.9% of the responders and less than 50% during other outdoor activities. 12.9% of the participants are using tanning beds and 4.2% concerned this healthy activity. 54% of the students were choosing UVB, 33% UVA and 23% UVC as risk factor in skin cancer development. Behavior and knowledge of the students were not influenced significantly by gender, positive family anamnesis concerning skin cancer and passing dermatology exam.

Of the 93 students who participated in the "Euromelanoma Day" screening campaign, 75% were female. 44% received severe sunburn earlier, 57% reported to use sunscreen regularly during sunbathing and 18% were tanning beds users. 58% of the students never participated earlier on a skin cancer screening. During the dermatological physical examination performed with dermoscopy, dysplastic nevi were found on 26.9%, solar lentigines on 64.5% of the students' skin.

Based on the results of the online survey and of the Euromelanoma skin cancer screening campaign we concluded that our medical students' knowledge about UV exposure and their sun protection habits are suboptimal. Taking into account their skin type and tanning behavior they are at risk to develop skin cancer. Further work is required to improve the knowledge and sun protection practices of our students, who in the future are expected to counsel patients and organize prevention campaigns.