

UC Davis

Dermatology Online Journal

Title

Slip, slop, slap, seek, slide - is the message really getting across?

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/99m9q3f4>

Journal

Dermatology Online Journal, 19(8)

Author

Buchanan, Lauren

Publication Date

2013

DOI

10.5070/D3198019258

Copyright Information

Copyright 2013 by the author(s). This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Commentary

Slip, slop, slap, seek, slide - is the message really getting across?

Lauren Buchanan, MBBS, BSc

Dermatology Online Journal 19 (8): 1

Dermatology Research Centre, The University of Queensland, School of Medicine, Translational Research Institute, Brisbane and Dermatology Department, Princess Alexandra Hospital, Brisbane

Correspondence:

Honorary Dermatology Registrar and Clinical Research Assistant
Dermatology Research Centre, The University of Queensland, School of Medicine, Translational Research Institute, Brisbane and Dermatology Department, Princess Alexandra Hospital, Brisbane
Email: laurenpbuchanan@gmail.com
Phone: 0426812598
Fax: 3443 7779



Figure 1. A typical image representing 'bronze Aussie' - This is in fact part of an advertisement for sunscreen. (<http://www.solrx.com.au/>)

Abstract

Australia has given a high priority to education programs emphasizing the relationship of sun exposure and skin cancer and teaching about sun safety and sun protection. Have these efforts been successful?

Commentary

Before launching into an appraisal on sun protection in Australia, I must confess that I too was somewhat naive or perhaps ignorant of the dangers associated with sun exposure. Here are a few facts to enlighten those also similarly unaware of such risks. In Australia, skin cancer is the most common type of cancer. It accounts for approximately 80% of newly diagnosed cancers [1]. Notably, the incidence of skin cancer in Australia is the highest in the world [2]. In fact, two in every three Australians are diagnosed with skin cancer before the age of seventy [3]. Each year in Australia over 1 600 people die from skin cancer. Skin cancer costs the Australian health system \$300 million per year [1].

It is believed that 90-99% of skin cancer is related to sun exposure. In Australia there are high levels of ultraviolet radiation

(UVR), all year round. In order to reduce the burden of skin cancer in Australia, it is vital that exposure to UVR is reduced [4]. This can be achieved by simple sun protection measures such as using SPF >15 sunscreen, staying out of the sun in peak times, and wearing a hat and sunglasses. Children in particular are a specific group of the population in which primary prevention (reducing UVR exposure) against skin cancer can be effective in preventing skin cancer [5].

Public health strategies – have they been appealing to the audience?

Public education focussing on skin protection and informing people of the harmful effects of sun exposure were implemented in Australia approximately 30 years ago. In the 1980s the first sun protection awareness campaign – ‘Slip! Slop! Slap!’ was dispersed nationwide. This has now been modified to include Slip, Slop, Slap, Seek, Slide to encourage the use of sunglasses and seeking shade. Since the 80’s, multi-component, community-wide programs such as SunSmart have been launched. A pivotal aspect of these programs is that they facilitate sun-related behavior modifications in various settings including schools and workplaces. However, research on sun protection within schools and families in Australia indicates that despite these programs, the rates of sun protection remain unsatisfactory. One study demonstrated that whilst there was an increase in sun protection policy in Australian primary schools between 1998 and 2005 up to 80%, there was a significant decrease in sunscreen use [6]. Another study looking at children’s sun protection in Australia showed that 8% of children were burnt on summer weekends, which was seemingly better than adults (18%) and adolescents (25%). These results are one of several studies that demonstrate that for *all* age groups, sun protection needs to be improved [5].

Adolescents a niche market

There is no denying that SunSmart campaigns targeting children are crucial, yet adolescents are another group within the population that need to be reached. Studies have shown that adolescents are often the worst offenders with regard to sun protection, or lack thereof. Melanoma, the most lethal of all skin cancers, is the most common cancer in young Australians (15-44 years) [7]. In fact the incidence of melanoma in Australia has doubled in the 20-years from 1986 to 2007 [7]. This is a frightening statistic. More recent public health campaigns are now targeting adolescents and tanning. Several states including Queensland ran a television campaign called The Dark Side of Tanning, promoting the notion, ‘there’s nothing healthy about a tan’. This campaign was aimed specifically at people aged 12-24 years. Another very touching campaign was that of Claire Oliver, a young Melbourne lady who died at the age of 26 years from melanoma. Hopefully these campaigns have some impact in improving not only this statistical figure but also the ideology around tanning in young people.

Where to from here...?

Campaigns such as SunSmart need to continue to expand their influence. Adolescents also need to be a continued focus of public health campaigns. Moreover, governments must look at other ways of decreasing this culture of *tanning*. For example, magazines often depict *healthy* women as tanned; sunscreen advertisements remarkably portray tanned people; solariums continue to be in demand - the number of solariums in Melbourne increased from 99 in 2001 to 169 in 2006 [8].

We must not be fooled into thinking that displaying a few shocking images and advertisements is enough to improve sun protection rates. General practitioners are in a unique position to promote sun protection, seeing children and families often on a regular basis. Skin cancer in Australia is a major public health problem, worthy of dedicating more consideration and funding into prevention. Undoubtedly, there has been a general improvement in sun protective behaviors in Australia over the last few decades. However, I argue that whilst an improvement is good, we need to be striving for the best sun protection rates and only then will we see a decline in skin cancer.

References

1. Cancer Council Australia. Skin Cancer [Internet] 2010 [updated 2012 Feb 09; cited 2012 October 04]. Available from: <http://www.cancer.org.au/about-cancer/types-of-cancer/skin-cancer.html>
2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and Australasian Association of Cancer Registries (2004). Cancer in Australia 2001. AIHW cat. no. CAN 23. Canberra, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
3. Staples M, Elwood M, Burton R, et al. Non-melanoma skin cancer in Australia: the 2002 national survey and trends since 1985. *Med J Aust.* 2006; 184: 6-10. PMID: 16398622
4. Dobbins S, Wakefield M, Hill D, et al. Prevalence and determinants of Australian adolescents' and adults' weekend sun protection and sunburn, summer 2003-2004. *J Am Acad Dermatol.* 2008;59(4):602-14. Epub 2008/08/12. PMID: 18691790
5. Dobbins S, Wakefield M, Hill D, et al. Children's sun exposure and sun protection: prevalence in Australia and related parental factors. *J Am Acad Dermatol.* 2012;66(6):938-47. Epub 2011/09/06. PMID: 21890234
6. Jones SB, Beckmann K, Rayner J. Australian primary schools' sun protection policy and practice: evaluating the impact of the National SunSmart Schools Program. *Health Promot J Austr.* 2008;19(2):86-90. Epub 2008/07/24. PMID:18647119
7. Melanoma Institute Australia. Melanoma facts and statistics. [Internet] 2011 [cited October 10 2012]. Available from: <http://www.melanoma.org.au/about-melanoma/melanoma-skin-cancer-facts.html>

8. Marinos, S. Australia becoming more sun smart [Internet] 2012 [cited 2012 October 10]. Available from: <http://www.bodyandsoul.com.au/health+healing/news+features/australia+becoming+more+sun+smart,16449>