Skin Cancer Incidence Increasing in Young, Especially Women

BY MICHÉLE G. SULLIVAN
Mid-Atlantic Bureau

I

n people younger than 40 years, the combined incidence of basal and squamous cell carcinomas increased by 74% from 1976 to 2003, said Leslie J. Christenson, M.D., and colleagues have reported.

From 1976 to 1979, the combined incidence of basal and squamous cell carcinoma was 19/100,000. In 2000-2003, the rate had increased to 33/100,000.

The biggest increase occurred in basal cell carcinoma in women, wrote Dr. Christenson, a dermatologist at the Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minn., and her associates. In 1976-1979, the incidence of basal cell carcinoma (BCC) in women was 13/100,000; by 2000-2003, it had risen to 31/100,000. Rates in men rose as well, but not as sharply (23/100,000 vs. 27/100,000).

Some experts are beginning to think there is, Bruce Armstrong, M.D., head of the school of public health at the University of Sydney, pointed out at the meeting. Reviewing the history of the evidence, Dr. Armstrong said it is fairly clear that exposure attenuates cancer risks, and that melanoma is not the sole malignancy to have a relationship to lack of sun.

The observation that sunlight may protect against cancer was first made in 1941 by investigators exploring the idea that people who get skin cancer did not get other cancers; since then, low sun exposure has been correlated with a high risk of prostate, breast, ovarian, and colon cancers and, most recently, non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma.

As with melanoma, data have suggested that sun exposure might attenuate the mortality of some of these cancers, Dr. Armstrong said.

In 1983 in Australia, his group documented an association between increased melanoma survival and sun exposure. More recently, another group has shown, using a large database, that in Europe melanoma diagnosis and mortality has a seasonal variation that may relate to sun exposure (Eur. J. Cancer 2005;41:126-32).

Though it is not proven that vitamin D is the mechanism of the cancer effects seen, there is some evidence that even in sunny climates, vitamin D deficiency may be common, Dr. Armstrong said.

One recent survey of Australian populations found that even at the end of summer, 30% of Australian boys were marginally vitamin D deficient, as was a much higher percentage of the elderly, particularly those with dark skin.

It also must be noted that sun exposure has a number of other health benefits, including promoting bone health and even just creating a sense of well-being, Dr. Armstrong added. In his comments, he said that receiving the equivalent of one minimal erythema dose to the hands and face per week is sufficient for vitamin D synthesis, Dr. Armstrong said. That amount of exposure, Dr. Berwick said, would translate into about 5-10 minutes per day spent in sunshine, two to three times per week.

On the other hand, no melanoma experts appear to be recommending that campaigns to reduce sunburn have much to do with promoting bone health and just creating a sense of well-being, Dr. Armstrong added. In his comments, he said that receiving the equivalent of one minimal erythema dose to the hands and face per week is sufficient for vitamin D synthesis, Dr. Armstrong said. That amount of exposure, Dr. Berwick said, would translate into about 5-10 minutes per day spent in sunshine, two to three times per week.

On the other hand, no melanoma experts appear to be recommending that campaigns to reduce sunburn have much to do with promoting bone health and just creating a sense of well-being, Dr. Armstrong added. In his comments, he said that receiving the equivalent of one minimal erythema dose to the hands and face per week is sufficient for vitamin D synthesis, Dr. Armstrong said. That amount of exposure, Dr. Berwick said, would translate into about 5-10 minutes per day spent in sunshine, two to three times per week.

On the other hand, no melanoma experts appear to be recommending that campaigns to reduce sunburn have much to do with promoting bone health and just creating a sense of well-being, Dr. Armstrong added. In his comments, he said that receiving the equivalent of one minimal erythema dose to the hands and face per week is sufficient for vitamin D synthesis, Dr. Armstrong said. That amount of exposure, Dr. Berwick said, would translate into about 5-10 minutes per day spent in sunshine, two to three times per week.

On the other hand, no melanoma experts appear to be recommending that campaigns to reduce sunburn have much to do with promoting bone health and just creating a sense of well-being, Dr. Armstrong added. In his comments, he said that receiving the equivalent of one minimal erythema dose to the hands and face per week is sufficient for vitamin D synthesis, Dr. Armstrong said. That amount of exposure, Dr. Berwick said, would translate into about 5-10 minutes per day spent in sunshine, two to three times per week.

On the other hand, no melanoma experts appear to be recommending that campaigns to reduce sunburn have much to do with promoting bone health and just creating a sense of well-being, Dr. Armstrong added. In his comments, he said that receiving the equivalent of one minimal erythema dose to the hands and face per week is sufficient for vitamin D synthesis, Dr. Armstrong said. That amount of exposure, Dr. Berwick said, would translate into about 5-10 minutes per day spent in sunshine, two to three times per week.

On the other hand, no melanoma experts appear to be recommending that campaigns to reduce sunburn have much to do with promoting bone health and just creating a sense of well-being, Dr. Armstrong added. In his comments, he said that receiving the equivalent of one minimal erythema dose to the hands and face per week is sufficient for vitamin D synthesis, Dr. Armstrong said. That amount of exposure, Dr. Berwick said, would translate into about 5-10 minutes per day spent in sunshine, two to three times per week.

On the other hand, no melanoma experts appear to be recommending that campaigns to reduce sunburn have much to do with promoting bone health and just creating a sense of well-being, Dr. Armstrong added. In his comments, he said that receiving the equivalent of one minimal erythema dose to the hands and face per week is sufficient for vitamin D synthesis, Dr. Armstrong said. That amount of exposure, Dr. Berwick said, would translate into about 5-10 minutes per day spent in sunshine, two to three times per week.

On the other hand, no melanoma experts appear to be recommending that campaigns to reduce sunburn have much to do with promoting bone health and just creating a sense of well-being, Dr. Armstrong added. In his comments, he said that receiving the equivalent of one minimal erythema dose to the hands and face per week is sufficient for vitamin D synthesis, Dr. Armstrong said. That amount of exposure, Dr. Berwick said, would translate into about 5-10 minutes per day spent in sunshine, two to three times per week.

On the other hand, no melanoma experts appear to be recommending that campaigns to reduce sunburn have much to do with promoting bone health and just creating a sense of well-being, Dr. Armstrong added. In his comments, he said that receiving the equivalent of one minimal erythema dose to the hands and face per week is sufficient for vitamin D synthesis, Dr. Armstrong said. That amount of exposure, Dr. Berwick said, would translate into about 5-10 minutes per day spent in sunshine, two to three times per week.

On the other hand, no melanoma experts appear to be recommending that campaigns to reduce sunburn have much to do with promoting bone health and just creating a sense of well-being, Dr. Armstrong added. In his comments, he said that receiving the equivalent of one minimal erythema dose to the hands and face per week is sufficient for vitamin D synthesis, Dr. Armstrong said. That amount of exposure, Dr. Berwick said, would translate into about 5-10 minutes per day spent in sunshine, two to three times per week.