

## **Skin Cancer Awareness**

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Imagine being diagnosed with a life-threatening disease that could have been prevented by simple precautions, like wearing sunscreen or avoiding tanning beds, this is the reality for many people diagnosed with skin cancer. This cancer is common throughout the United States, as well as worldwide. Despite how common the cancer is, it is also one of most preventable types of cancer. Exposure to ultraviolet radiation from the sun and artificial sources like tanning beds is the leading cause. Yet, many people continue to engage in these high-risk behaviors without fully understanding the long-term consequences that come along with them. The three main types of skin cancer are basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and melanoma, with melanoma being the most aggressive and deadly. With the right knowledge and proactive measures, the risk of skin cancer can be significantly lowered. Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer, yet it is preventable and highly treatable with proper screening, education, prevention, and early treatment.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Each year, millions of new cases of skin cancer are diagnosed, and categorized into three main types, including melanoma or non-melanomas known as basal cell carcinoma (BCC) and squamous cell carcinoma (SCC). BCC is the most common, with about 3.6 million cases diagnosed in the U.S. annually (Skin Cancer Foundation [SCF], 2024). These start in the basal cells of the epidermis and typically appear as a pearly bump or a sore that does not heal. While BCC rarely spreads, it can cause significant damage to surrounding tissue if left untreated. SCC, the second most common type, accounts for around 1.8 million cases each year (SCF, 2024). This cancer begins in the squamous cells of the epidermis and often shows up as a red, scaly patch, a firm nodule, or an open sore that may bleed or crust over. Unlike BCC, SCC has a

higher chance of spreading, especially if not treated. Both types are typically found on areas of the head and neck that get the most sun exposure, like the nose, ears, and upper lip (Gruber et al., 2020). On the other hand, melanoma, while less common, is still the most aggressive and deadly form of skin cancer, responsible for the majority of skin cancer deaths. This type of skin cancer begins in the pigment-producing melanocytes of the skin and can metastasize to other organs if not caught early. Melanomas are described as lesions that are brown to black in color, with uneven shape, irregular edges, and a diameter larger than 6 mm (Gruber et al., 2020). Melanomas can develop anywhere on the body, but they are most often found on the backs and shoulders of men and the lower limbs of women, with the face being the highest-risk area for both genders (Gruber et al., 2020).

Skin cancer, especially melanoma, has been on the rise in recent years. From 2015 to 2025, the number of new invasive melanoma cases has increased by 42% (SCF, 2024). The Skin Cancer Foundation (2024) also points out that having five or more sunburns doubles the risk of developing melanoma. While fair-skinned individuals are at the highest risk, skin cancer can affect anyone, regardless of skin tone. UV exposure contributes to cancer development in two main ways, it causes DNA damage that leads to mutations and weakens the immune system's ability to detect and destroy malignant cells (Gruber et al., 2020).

For nurses, this increase means a bigger role in prevention, screening, and patient education. Nurses are very important when it comes to teaching patients how to protect themselves from the sun, providing skin checks, and spotting the early signs of skin cancer (SCF, 2024). By raising awareness and encouraging people to get checked early, nurses can help lower the number of advanced cases and improve patient outcomes while at the same time lowering the burden on the healthcare system (Wunderlich et al., 2024).

As the number of skin cancer diagnoses continues to grow, the healthcare system is feeling the pressure to handle more screenings and treatments. The rise in cases among younger people is particularly worrying, as it shows just how dangerous excessive UV exposure can be over time. This shows the need for stronger prevention efforts, earlier detection, and more education for young people, who might not fully understand the risks of tanning and sun exposure. On that note, survival rates for skin cancer depend on when it's caught and what type it is. The Skin Cancer Foundation (2024) states that early-stage melanoma has a 99% survival rate, but once it spreads to distant organs, that drops to just 35%. Non-melanoma skin cancers like BCC and SCC are also highly treatable if detected early, but if ignored, they can cause serious complications (Win & Tsao, 2023).

If left untreated, skin cancer can lead to chronic pain, and increased mortality, leading to increased hospitalizations and long-term care needs. Advanced-stage skin cancer often requires surgery, chemotherapy, immunotherapy, or radiation, all of which are costly, physically, and emotionally taxing for patients. As more cases go untreated or are diagnosed late, the strain on healthcare systems will increase, requiring more healthcare resources and personnel to address these needs (Wunderlich et al., 2024).

### **Risk Reduction/Treatment of the Problem**

Skin cancer is preventable by reducing exposure to UV radiation from the sun and tanning beds. According to the Skin Cancer Foundation (2024), using broad-spectrum sunscreen with at least SPF 30, reapplying every two hours, and wearing protective clothing like hats and long sleeves are essential prevention strategies. It's also important to avoid sun exposure between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., when UV rays are strongest (Win & Tsao, 2023). Also, educating the public, especially children and teenagers, about sun safety and the risks of tanning beds is

crucial in reducing skin cancer rates. For individuals with fair skin or a family history of skin cancer, regular skin self-exams can help spot early signs, such as changes in moles or new growths (SCF, 2024). Early detection is key for successful treatment, and dermatologic exams using tools like dermoscopy or total body photography are recommended for those at higher risk, such as people with a history of excessive sun exposure (Win & Tsao, 2023). Nurses also play an important part in conducting skin assessments, providing patient education about the ABCDE rule for melanoma detection, and educating patients on when to seek medical attention. The ABCDE rule involves checking for asymmetry, irregular borders, multiple colors, a diameter larger than 6mm, and any evolving or changing characteristics in moles or spots (Wunderlich et al., 2024).

Skin cancer treatment depends on the type, stage, and location of the cancer. Common treatments include surgical excision for non-melanoma cancers, however, skin cancers larger than 2 cm in diameter or those found in functionally and cosmetically sensitive areas such as the head, neck, hands, feet, and genitalia are typically treated with Mohs micrographic surgery, a specialized surgical procedure (Gruber et al., 2020). Cryotherapy is also done for early-stage BCC and SCC. For advanced melanoma, immunotherapy may be necessary, while chemotherapy and radiation are used for more aggressive or metastatic cancers (SCF, 2024). Lifestyle changes also play a part in reducing skin cancer risk. Avoiding tanning beds is crucial, as their UV radiation increases the risk of melanoma, particularly in younger individuals. Also, a diet rich in antioxidants, such as vitamins C and E, can help protect the skin from UV damage. Lastly, quitting smoking can lower the risk of SCC, which is also strongly linked to tobacco use (Win & Tsao, 2023).

### **Planning of Teaching Content**

The teaching content at the health fair will focus on participants being able to identify at least two different key risk factors for skin cancer, such as excessive sun exposure and tanning bed use. It will also allow participants to acknowledge at least two different prevention strategies, including regular sunscreen use and wearing protective clothing like hats. Education will be taught by using the teach-back method, where participants will practice performing skin self-exams to check for new moles or changes in existing ones. Also, demonstrations on how to properly apply sunscreen, with participants practicing the application and learning the importance of reapplying every two hours or after swimming or sweating. A trifold poster with information on skin cancer prevention and early detection will serve as a visual aid as well, and a sorting game will help participants distinguish between normal moles and cancerous ones. Lastly, educational pamphlets will offer additional details on risk factors, prevention strategies, and early detection, while samples of sunscreen will be given out.

### **Conclusion**

Understanding the risks of sun exposure and the different types of skin cancer, such as basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and melanoma, helps individuals take proactive steps. Nurses play an important role in prevention by educating patients and encouraging early detection. With the education of proper sun protection and sunscreen application discussed at the health fair, skin cancer rates can be reduced, and health outcomes can improve. Ongoing research, public health initiatives, and evidence-based practices are essential in lowering skin cancer mortality rates. Through the combined efforts of healthcare professionals and the public, the spread of skin cancer can be prevented, significantly improving the quality of life for those at risk. Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer, yet it is preventable and highly treatable with proper screening, education, prevention, and early treatment.

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