



GETTING UNDER THE SKIN OF MALIGNANT MELANOMA

A research report into the perceptions and attitudes of British adults towards skin cancer, specifically malignant melanoma, as well as their knowledge levels and related behaviour patterns

This research report has been written by Consultant Dermatologist and Dermatological Surgeon Dr Bav Shergill with support from the British Skin Foundation team

INTRODUCTION TO THE REPORT

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the UK, and rates continue to rise. At least 100,000 new cases are now diagnosed each year in the UK, with malignant melanoma, the most dangerous form of the disease, taking over 2,500 lives - that's seven people every day.

There is currently no cure for the disease, and treatments are limited once it's spread beyond its original site. We want to change that.

This report has been developed to help support the launch of a new skin cancer research fundraising campaign by the British Skin Foundation called 'It Takes 7'. We want to highlight that skin cancer is a very serious disease that can affect anyone but that misconceptions about the severity and risk are common. To end goal is to encourage positive behaviour change, as well as to help ensure people recognise the need for more research into skin cancer.

The basis of the research is a questionnaire completed by 5,000 British adults during February 2014.

It is worth noting at this point that although there are three common types of skin cancer - Basal cell carcinoma, Squamous cell carcinoma and malignant melanoma - in this report we are going to primarily focus on the most deadly form of skin cancer, melanoma.



THE 'IT TAKES 7' CAMPAIGN

It Takes 7 is a fundraising campaign set up by the British Skin Foundation to raise as much money as possible to fund research into skin cancer. 100% of every pound raised will go towards vital research, so every donation really will take us one step closer to finding a cure.

It gets across the tragic reality of skin cancer but also celebrates the positive impact that groups of people can make when they pull together for a cause.

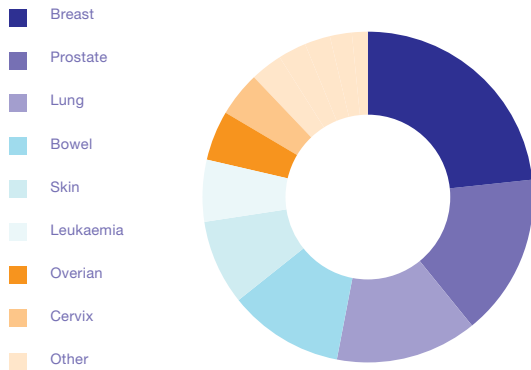
For more information or to support the campaign,

visit www.ittakesseven.org.uk.

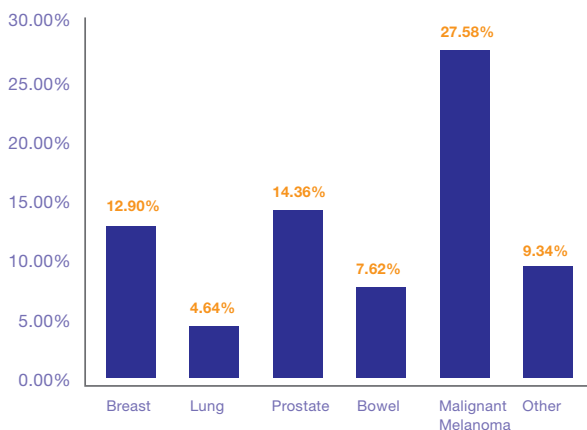


AWARENESS ABOUT THE PREVALENCE OF SKIN CANCER

Graph 1: Which of the following do you think are the most common types of cancer in the UK in terms of prevalence? (tick all that apply)



Graph 2: Which of the following common types of cancer do you think is growing the fastest in terms of prevalence in the UK?



OTHER KEY STATISTICS:

29% don't know melanoma is a type of skin cancer

85% underestimated how many people are diagnosed with malignant melanoma in the UK every year

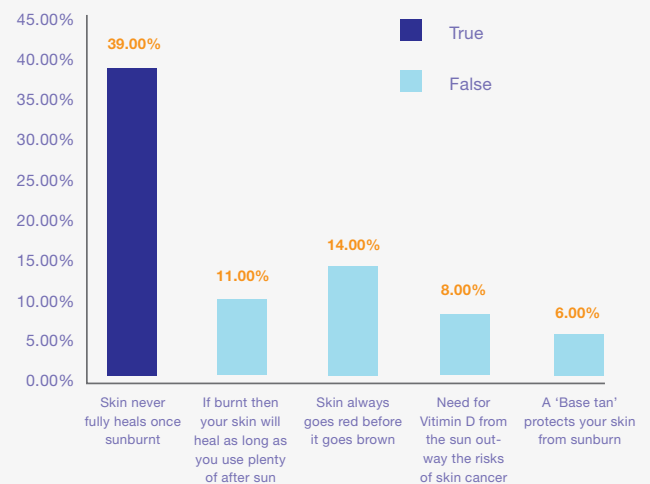
COMMENTARY

- It is telling that just 28% of the respondents recognised skin cancer as one of the most common types of cancer in the UK when in fact it is THE most prevalent.

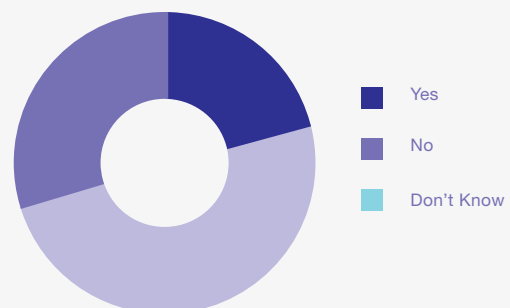
- Malignant melanoma, the most deadly form of skin cancer, is actually the fifth most prevalent cancer, with rates having increased more rapidly than any other of the ten most common cancers.
- Approximately 13,000 people are diagnosed with malignant melanoma in the UK every year but the average answer was around half that at 6,366. This suggests people do not realise the prevalence and therefore the associated risk.
- Interestingly, less females recognised that malignant melanoma is the fastest growing type of cancer than males, despite the fact that it is increasingly affecting them more.
- We often try and minimise risks of getting cancer in order to reassure ourselves. However, skin cancer is increasing in prevalence year on year, so we need to accept that it is a growing problem within our society.

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT RISK FACTORS RELATED TO SKIN CANCER

Graph 3: Which of the following statements do you believe to be true (tick all that apply)



Graph 4: Do you think all cases of skin cancer are caused by excessive sun exposure?



OTHER KEY STATISTICS:

34% don't know that skin cancer can appear on any area of the body, including 'under your nails' and 'on the palms of your feet'

18% are unaware that you can get skin cancer, whatever your skin colour

11% of women recognised that their legs are the area of their body were they are most likely to get malignant melanoma

66% realised that a use of sun beds can increase your risk of skin cancer

78% have had burnt skin after being 'caught out by the sun'

24% didn't realise your skin can still be damaged by the sun on a cloudy day

10% believe there is no risk of skin cancer from the sun as long as you don't get burnt

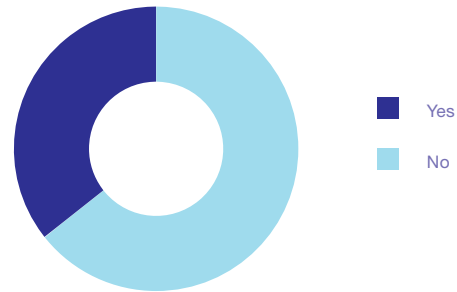
26% used a tanning bed, and an additional 8% haven't yet but would consider it

COMMENTARY

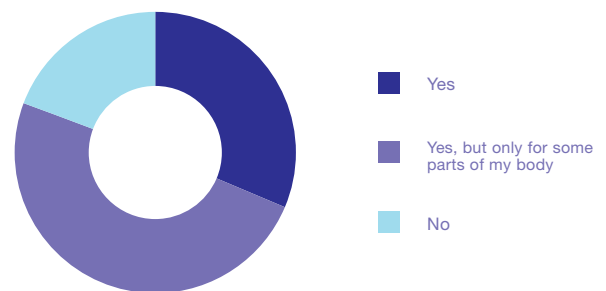
- Graph 4 shows the many misconceptions that exist with regards to over exposure to the sun, which are causing people to put themselves at a significant degree of risk.
- It's surprising for many that legs are actually the most likely body area for woman to get MM. Most (a third) thought the head and neck were the most at risk area. It's important that people are aware of the risk to legs, as many people expose their legs to the sun on a regular basis without a second thought.
- Just over a fifth (21%) believe that all cases of skin cancer are caused by excessive sun exposure, which surprises me as the reality is that a lot of my patients don't even sunbathe.
- It's a concern but not a surprise that 8 in 10 people have experienced over-exposure to the sun. The important thing for people to remember is that once skin has been sunburnt, it is never the same again. Exposure to the sun degrades the quality of the skin making it more at risk the next time it is exposed.
- The fact that a quarter of people didn't realise there is a risk of skin sun damage on a cloudy day goes some way to explaining why so many people get caught out. You skin can in fact be damaged by the sun through glass windows and even through your clothes showing the need for sun cream.

HOW VIGILANT PEOPLE ARE FOR SIGNS OF SKIN CANCER, AND HOW LIKELY THEY ARE TO ACT PROMPTLY

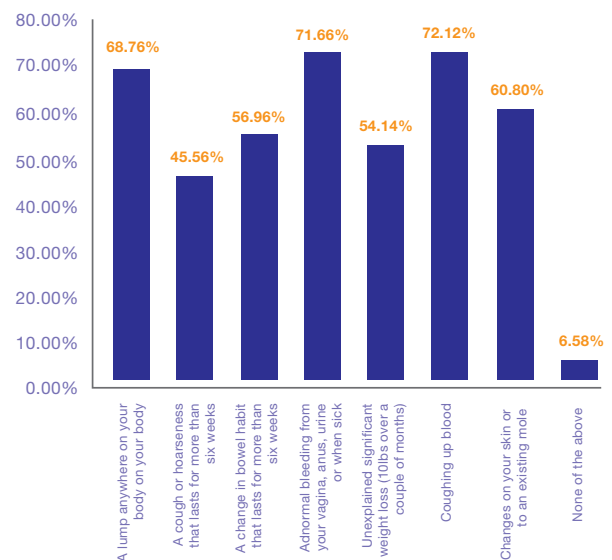
Graph 5: Do you ever check your skin for signs of skin cancer?



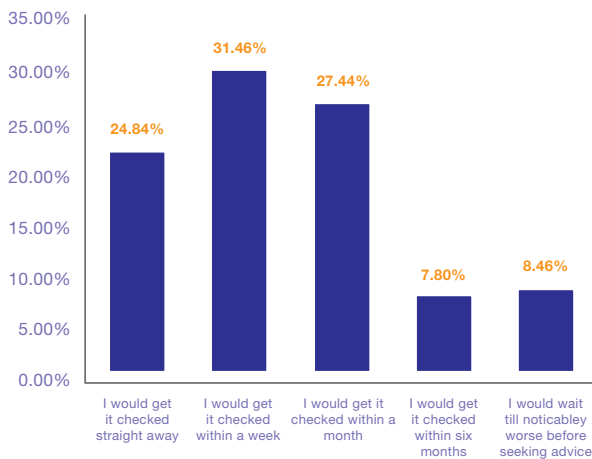
Graph 6: Do you know the pattern of moles, blemishes and freckles on your skin so that you would be able to notice any changes?



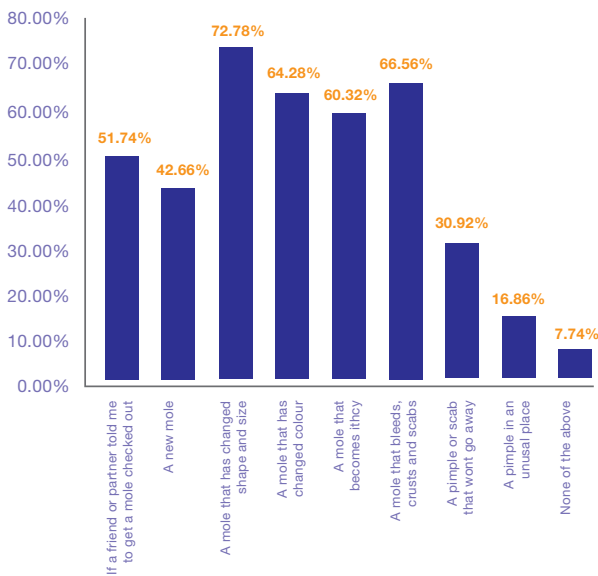
Graph 7: Which of the following would you act on straight away?



Graph 8: If you noticed a change in mole, how long do you think you would wait until getting it medically checked?



Graph 9: Which of the following would make you visit your GP? (tick all that apply)



OTHER KEY STATISTICS

30% nearly a third believe skin cancer can be hard to diagnose

29% don't realise that if skin cancer is diagnosed early you have a better chance of survival

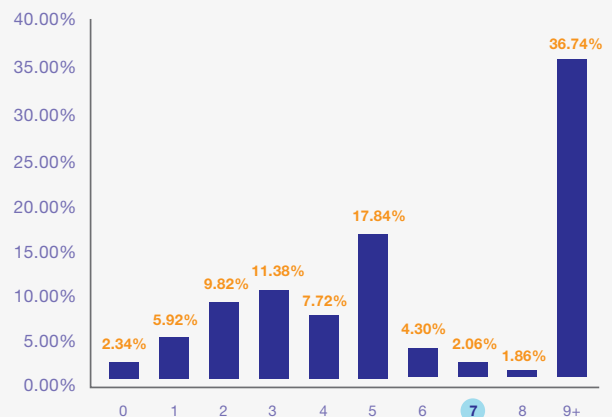
COMMENTARY

- Only a third (36%) of people are actively checking for signs of skin cancer, which is a huge concern as everyone should be checking their skin once a month. 29% said they would feel confident knowing what to look for if they did check, while 35% wouldn't.

- Men are significantly less likely to check than women – 30% versus 41%.
- People are much more likely to check their skin as they get older – just 24% of those aged 18 to 24 compared to 46% of those aged 55+ .
- Only a third (32%) felt they knew their pattern of moles, blemished and freckles on all their skin and would notice a change. 18-24 year olds appear to be most ignorant when it comes to checking their skin and knowing what to look for, which is worrying when MM is the second fastest growing type of cancer in 18-34 year olds.
- The worry here is that a only a quarter (25%) would get medical opinion straight away. We can't be sure of the reasons for this, but often it can be due to the patient's fear of wasting their GP's time. In fact, it's a very pleasurable experience to be able to tell a patient that they have nothing to worry about, so they should always get a professional opinion at the first sight of any change.
- Skin cancer patients have a survival rate of over 90% if it is caught early. The thing to look out for is if a mole is changing. If it is changing shape and becoming asymmetrical, if the border is blurring, if there are more than one colour within it, or if it is growing more than 6mm in diameter. They often grow slowly so it can take 12-14 months to diagnose, so a mole needs to be tracked in terms of change. With regular checks to identify any change on the skin, they can be diagnosed early on and prevent the cancer spreading to other parts of the body. There are three key stages that individuals need to understand; prevention, early identification and treatment. By protecting the skin from sun damage and checking regularly the treatment stage can be avoided altogether.

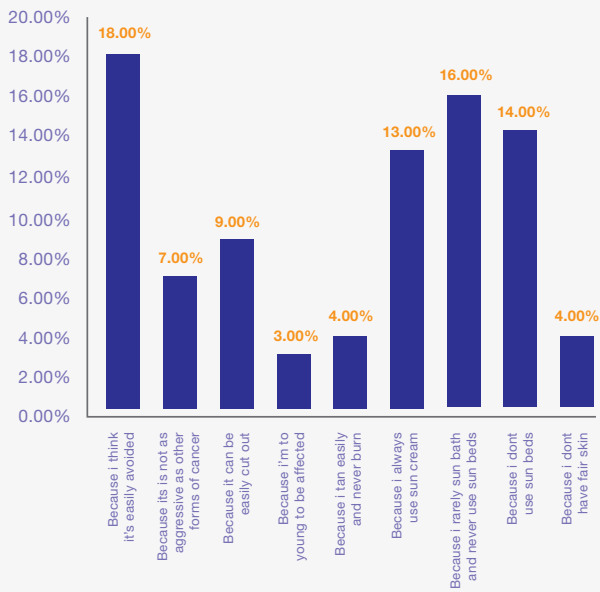
UNDERSTANDING ABOUT THE SEVERITY OF SKIN CANCER

Graph 10: On average, how many people do you think die from skin cancer in the UK every day?

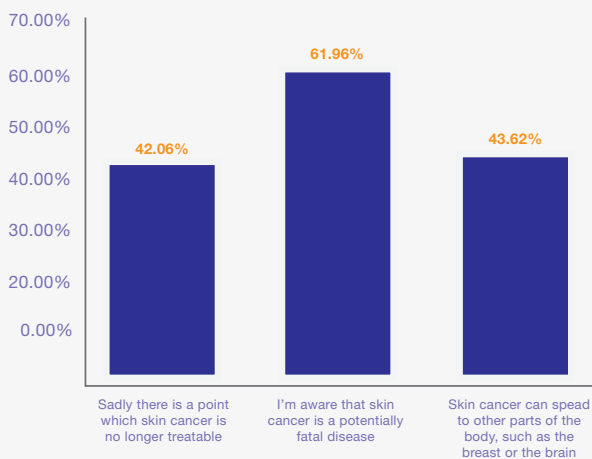


7 people die every day in the UK

Graph 11: If they worry less about skin cancer than other types of cancer, what are the reasons? (tick all that apply)



Graph 12: Which of the following do you believe to be true? (tick all that apply)



OTHER KEY STATISTICS:

11% believe the signs of skin cancer are always visible on the skin

45% said that malignant melanoma was one of the cancers that they feared the most, coming fourth behind bowel, breast and brain cancer

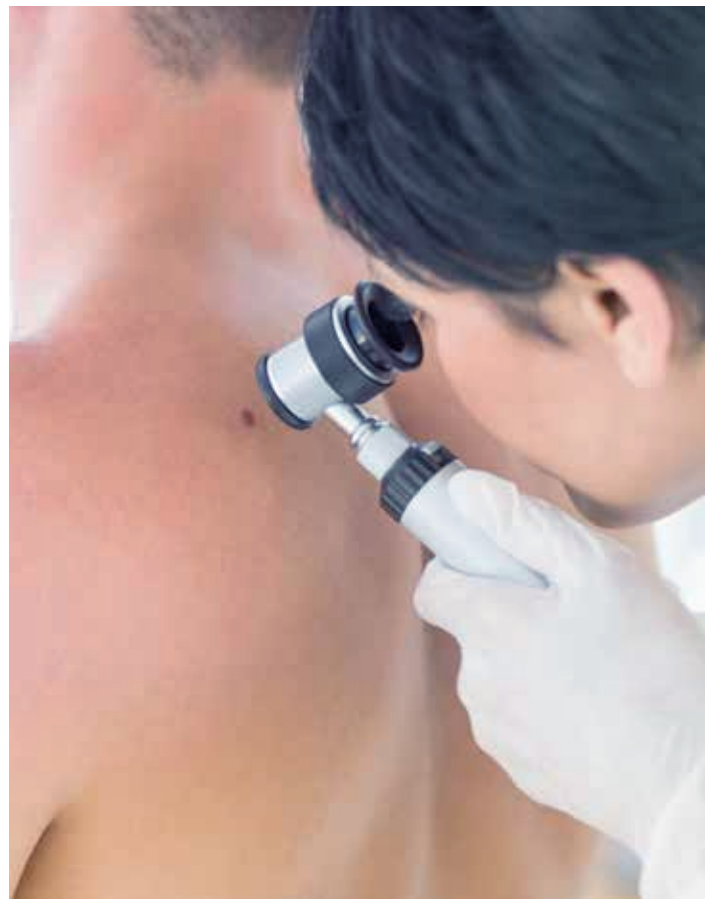
63% underestimated the lifetime risk of being diagnosed with skin cancer at some point in their life

28% almost half don't know anything about the stages of cancer, showing the lack of knowledge unless you have a personal experience of it

6% believe skin cancer isn't as serious as other forms of cancer

COMMENTARY

- Skin cancer kills 7 people every day in the UK, so with only 41% of people being aware that deaths are at this level, a huge proportion of the population are underestimating how fatal it can be.
- The key stat that's of importance here is that 18%, almost a fifth, believe that skin cancer is easily avoided. With this in mind, it's interesting to see that these 18% aren't actually taking the precautions they need to be at minimal risk from skin cancer (misguided complacency).
- The fact that over half were not aware that skin cancer can spread to other parts of the body is shocking and shows a lack of understanding and awareness. My first experience of melanoma was my boss, who died. He had a mole removed some years ago and assumed the cancer had been successfully treated, but in fact before it was removed it had already spread to his back.
- Skin cancer can often be removed with a simple procedure, however this is only the case if it is detected early and has not spread. Diagnosis itself involves cutting out a small piece of the affected area, but treatment can require a bigger area of skin to be cut out.



CONCLUSION

- 1.** Skin cancer prevalence is increasing at a worrying rate and people are under-estimating the risk from skin cancer, particularly malignant melanoma. Despite our best efforts with education campaigns, we are still seeing an increase in skin cancer. While this partially reflects sun-damage that occurred many years before we knew what the consequences would be, there is certainly an element of complacency regarding sun protection. In my own practice in Brighton, we have seen cases rocket by over 200% from 10 years ago. We are treating younger patients too and we also have an ageing population that have had a lot of sun damage. While fewer people actively sunbathe, they are undertaking more outdoors activities such as running, gardening and cycling, which exposes them to more sun than before. It is a myth that sun-bathing alone is the root cause of skin cancer – we need to think about how much sun exposure we receive rather than whether we lie out in the sun when evaluating risks.
- 2.** People need to be more vigilant for signs of skin cancer and recognise the need to act straight away if they spot changes to their skin. The good news is that skin cancers are very successfully treated if caught early. Picking up on changes to our skin needs to be a cultural habit for us all. Ideally, we should check our skin once a month for any new growths or changes in any pre-existing moles.
- 3.** Skin cancer is a complex disease and more research is needed to help us learn more about it so that lives can be saved. We are in an era where we may be able to find the specific faults in cancer DNA that can be targeted by specifically designed drugs. This research is not complete and as yet we have no perfect ‘magic bullet’. However, more ‘hard-core’ scientific research can reveal new weaknesses within the skin cancer cells that we can exploit to find a cure.
- 4.** Raising money to fund research into skin cancer can be cathartic for people who have been affected by the disease. Patients and their families can feel helpless once given their diagnosis. Giving everybody a chance to take a positive step towards curing this disease can be a real boost that switches roles from being passive to active in the fight against skin cancer.



www.britishskinfoundation.org.uk
www.ittakesseven.org.uk

