

Lay People's Knowledge and Understanding about Malignant Melanoma - Consultant Dermatologists' Perspectives

John L. Anderson and Aalya Al-Assaf

Department of Medical Education, Brighton & Sussex Medical School, University of Brighton, UK

Malignant Melanoma (MM) is the fifth most common type of cancer in the UK in 2014 and is on the increase. It is important to be aware of public perceptions of the implications of Melanoma in terms of severity and outcomes as this may contribute to their protection behaviours.

Aim: To explore Consultant Dermatologists' knowledge and experience about lay people's understanding of MM and its significance.

Method: This study was approved by the Brighton and Sussex Medical School (BSMS), Division of Medical Education (DME) Dissertation Panel, the BSMS Research Governance and Ethics Committee (RGEC), East of England - Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire Research Ethics Committee, and by Research and Development (R&D) department at Brighton and Sussex University Hospital (BSUH) Trusts. A qualitative (ethnographic) approach was adopted. Loosely Structured in-depth interviews with five Consultant Dermatologists in Sussex/United Kingdom (UK) were performed. A Framework Approach was adopted to analyse the interviews.

Results: The key findings of the main emerging themes from the interviews were: Lack of knowledge about MM and lack of differentiation between MM and other less serious types of Skin Cancer (SC); Misconception about MM among some Health Care Professionals (HCPs); Misconception about sun exposure and tanning bed; The National Health Services (NHS) and the government policy in dealing with melanoma were criticised for getting it managed by inexperienced people in the community; The importance of introducing Dermoscopy in the UK and training doctors on it efficiently; Disconnect between patients and doctors; The importance of educating everybody about MM and moles; Lack of workforce capacity in the UK to provide lifetime follow-up for MM patients; Disconnect between Dermatologists' experiences and the current recommendations in the guidelines; The short duration of consultation appointment is an obstacle to build a therapeutic relationships with patients; Doctors are thought to be a step-back in their communications and empathy from nurses.

Conclusion: There is a need to enhance lay people's as well as HCPs' awareness about MM. There is a need for continuous awareness campaigns. Doctors need to empathise more with their patients. The consultation time may need to be increased. It is wished that the patient sees the same HCP(s) during their treatment and follow-up period. It is necessary to study the effectiveness and feasibility of establishing a SC screening programme in the UK.