Sun Protection Awareness and Practice among an Adult General Practice Population

Abstract:

Sir

Skin cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in Ireland and numbers are continuing to increase year on year. 90% of skin cancer is preventable with optimal sun protection. Our aims were to assess patients knowledge of sun protection, level of sun exposure and sun protection practices and to examine any correlations between these variables. A cross-sectional validated questionnaire-based study involving 3 mixed rural-urban general practice populations in the Munster region was undertaken, with ICGP Ethical Committee Approval.

The approximate combined total population of the 3 practices was 11,065 patients. The computer patient databases were used to generate a randomised patient sample of patients over the age of 18 years. The sample size was calculated based on a cut-off p-value of 0.05, power values of 0.75 to 0.80, and effect size of 0.2–0.3. Based on these calculations an estimated sample size of 180 patients was required. A validated questionnaire which was developed in the United States and published in 2012 entitled the Sun Exposure and Behaviour Inventory was used and piloted. This questionnaire was posted to 440 randomly selected patients with a stamped address return envelope enclosed. The questionnaires were completed anonymously. 200 (45%) were returned and the data was encoded and entered into SPSS and stored on password protected laptops of the researchers. The study was funded by the 3 researchers and there are no conflicts of interest to declare. The study found that knowledge was high with over 180 responders (90%) scoring moderate – high in knowledge scores. 114 people studied (57%) report lifetime sun exposure to be moderate to very high. The majority of the sample studied reported having had sunburn 1 to 10 times. Sunburn which blistered, was experienced by 70 (35%) of our responders 1 to 3 times in their life. 175 responders (75%) report never having used a sunbed. 124 people (62%) use sunscreen with 128 people (64%) using SPF 15 or higher. Sunglasses are commonly used with 134(67%) of responders using this method regularly. Long-sleeved shirts are worn regularly by 173 (86.5%) of responders. Almost equal number of responders do not seek/rarely seek shade as use it regularly. However 27 people (13.6%) used no sun protection at all; and 5(2.5%) of the responders use the optimal five combination sun protection methods recommended by the World Health Organisation and Irish Cancer Society.

In conclusion, this study found while adult patient knowledge levels regarding sun protection were encouraging, sun protection practices were sub optimal, and indicate a need for further health promotion to reduce the skin cancer burden of Irish adults in the future. From a general practice point of view, it points towards the need for more health promotion and education. We hope that this study will encourage more GPs to take a more active role in promoting skin cancer awareness among the general public.

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References