EUROPEAN ACADEMY OF DERMATOLOGY & VENEREOLOGY

Press Release

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Non-melanoma skin cancer killing more people than melanoma, new study finds

(Wednesday, 11 October 2023, Berlin, Germany) Non-melanoma skin cancer (NMSC) is causing a greater number of global deaths than melanoma, the more serious form of skin cancer, a new study presented today at the European Academy of Dermatology and Venerology (EADV) Congress 2023 has found.[1,2]

Researchers also believe that NMSC is underreported and that the true impact of this disease may be even higher than estimated.[3]

Professor Thierry Passeron, lead author of the study, explains, "Although NMSC is less likely to be fatal than melanoma skin cancer, its prevalence is strikingly higher. In 2020, NMSC accounted for 78% of all skin cancer cases, resulting in over 63,700 deaths. In contrast, melanoma caused an estimated 57,000 fatalities in the same year. The significantly higher incidence of NMSC has, therefore, led to a more substantial overall impact."

Professor Passeron adds, "As alarming as these figures are, they may, in fact, be underestimated. NMSC is often underreported in cancer registries, making it challenging to understand the true burden."

In addition to examining the overall burden of skin cancers, the researchers identified specific population groups that were more at risk of this disease, including people who work outside, organ transplant recipients and those who have the skin condition xeroderma pigmentosum (an inherited extreme sun sensitivity condition).[1,4]

The study, which utilised data from the World Health Organization International Agency for Research on Cancer, found a high incidence of skin cancer in fair-skinned and elderly populations from the USA, Germany, UK, France, Australia and Italy.[1] However, even countries with a high proportion of dark phenotypes were not immune to the risk of death from skin cancer, as demonstrated by the registered 11,281 deaths in Africa.[1]

In 2020, there were nearly 1.2 million reported cases of NMSC worldwide compared with 324,635 cases of melanoma.[3] The majority of skin cancer occurrences are non-melanoma, referring to a group of cancers that slowly develop in the upper layers of the skin, with common types including basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma.[2,5] In comparison with melanoma, a type of skin cancer that develops in the melanocytes (cells that produce melanin), NMSC is less likely to spread to other parts of the body and can be treated more easily.[5,6]

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Professor Passeron comments, “We have to get the message out that not only melanoma can be fatal, but NMSC also. It's crucial to note that individuals with melanin rich skin are also at risk and are dying from skin cancer. There is a need to implement effective strategies to reduce the fatalities associated with all kinds of skin cancers.”

“Our study did not find consistent evidence to suggest that having more dermatologists per capita could reduce mortality rates. Surprisingly, countries like Australia, the UK and Canada, with fewer dermatologists, exhibited low mortality-to-incidence ratios. We therefore need to explore what strategies these countries are employing to reduce the impact of skin cancer in further depth. The involvement of other healthcare practitioners, such as GPs, in the identification and management of this disease may partly explain their success. There remains huge opportunity worldwide to elevate the role of GPs and other healthcare professionals in this process and train them to recognise suspicious lesions early.”

“In alignment with this, there is an ongoing need to develop awareness campaigns that educate the general public about the risks of sun exposure and other relevant risk factors. These campaigns should be tailored to at-risk populations, including those with fair skin, outdoor workers, the elderly and individuals who are immunosuppressed. Importantly, these efforts should also extend to populations that may not typically be considered at high risk, such as darker-skinned populations.”

Professor Passeron concludes, “Skin cancers are preventable and treatable, so we need to do more to ensure we are stopping the progression of this disease as early as possible to save lives.”

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Note to editors:

A reference to the EADV Congress 2023 must be included in all coverage and/or articles associated with this study.

For more information or to arrange an expert interview, please contact Phoebe May at phoebe.may@emotiveagency.com or press@eadv.org.

Disclosures:

This work has been conducted by L’Oréal Dermatological Beauty Corporate and Social Responsibility team, and La Roche-Posay experts, in collaboration with Professor Thierry Passeron and with the support of FutureBridge company.

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About the study author:

Professor Thierry Passeron is Professor and Chair of Dermatology in the University hospital of Nice. He also heads the laboratory INSERM U1065 team 12, C3M, dedicated to the study of molecular mechanisms involved in pigmentation and melanoma. He heads the University laser center in Nice. He is President of the Department of Clinical Research and Innovation of Nice University hospital and Vice-president of Côte d'Azur University. He has 12 international patents and more than 330 publications in scientific journals (h-index 55). He is the co-founder of Yukin therapeutics. His fields of research include pigmentary disorders (including vitiligo and melasma), melanoma, hidradenitis suppurativa, alopecia areata and lasers.

About EADV:

Founded in 1987, EADV is a non-profit organisation with a vision to form a premier European Dermatology-Venereology Society. The Academy counts over 9000 members from 120 countries, providing a valuable service for every type of dermatologist-venereologist professional. The EADV is dedicated to advancing patient care, education and research by providing a unique platform to bring people together and share ideas.

This year, the EADV Congress will take place in Berlin, Germany, and online from

11–14 October 2023.

Find out more via the EADV website: https://www.eadv.org/

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