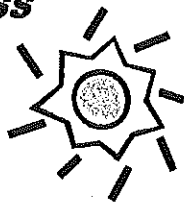


From Your Parish Nurse.....

SKIN CANCER AWARENESS

Did you know that skin cancer is the most common form of cancer, accounting for about half of all reported cancers?



Skin cancer is dangerous. Everyone is at risk for it, no matter what your skin color is. Everyone needs to protect themselves from the sun and should be familiar with their own skin, especially the pattern of moles, freckles and beauty marks. Be alert to changes in the number, size, shape or color of spots on the skin, and call your doctor if any unusual changes are found!

First, a quick lesson in the anatomy of your skin...

The skin has three layers –

- * the **epidermis**, the top (outer) layer which is very thin and serves to protect the deeper layers of skin and organs. The epidermis has 3 layers: upper, middle and a lower layer made up of *basal cells*. Basal cells divide to form *squamous cells* which produce a substance called keratin that helps to protect the body. The epidermis also contains another type of cell called *melanocyte*, which produces brown pigment – melanin – that makes the skin tan or brown, and protects the deeper layers of skin from the harmful effects of the sun.
- * the **dermis**, or middle layer of the skin, is much thicker than the epidermis, and contains hair shafts, sweat glands, blood vessels and nerves
- * the **subcutis**, or deepest layer of the skin, works to keep in heat and acts as a shock absorber to protect deeper muscles and organs from injury

Fortunately, most tumors of the skin are not cancer and rarely turn into cancers, **but**, some are early warning signs that the skin has been damaged and regular skin checks and prevention measures are needed!

TYPES OF SKIN CANCERS

Because different types of skin cancers behave differently, they are divided into two major groups: nonmelanoma and melanoma.

Nonmelanoma skin cancers (usually basal cell and squamous cell cancers) are the most common cancers of the skin. They include all forms of skin cancer except one – malignant melanoma (cancers that develop from melanocytes). About 75% of skin cancers are *basal cell carcinoma* which begins in the lower layer of the epidermis. They usually begin on areas exposed to the sun such as the head and neck. Basal cell cancers tend to grow slowly, and it is very unusual for a basal cell cancer to spread to distant parts of the body. But, if it is not treated, it can grow into nearby areas and invade the bone or

other tissues beneath the skin. 35-50% of people who have one basal cell cancer will develop another within 5 years. *Squamous cell carcinoma* begins in the upper part of the epidermis, accounts for about 20% of all skin cancers, and usually appears on the face, ears, neck, lips, or back of hands; squamous cell cancers are more likely to invade deeper fatty tissues below the skin, and more likely to spread to lymph nodes or other body parts.

Melanoma accounts for about 3% of all skin cancers, but it causes most skin cancer-related deaths. Melanoma is cancer that begins in the melanocyte cells, which may keep producing melanin coloring so that melanoma tumors are often (not always!) brown or black. Melanoma most often appears on the trunk of fair skinned men and on the lower legs of fair-skinned women, but it can appear other places as well. While melanoma is almost always curable in its early stages, it is more likely than other skin cancers to spread to other parts of the body...less common but more deadly...

RISK FACTORS

A risk factor is anything that increases a person's chance of getting a disease... for skin cancers, risk factors include; previous history of skin cancer, excessive exposure to ultraviolet light either sunlight or tanning booths, being fair skinned, men are more likely to have skin cancer, exposure to certain chemicals, radiation exposure, long term severe skin problems, smoking, genetics

THE ABCD RULE...

How can you tell a normal mole or freckle from a cancerous one?

A: asymmetry: one half of the mole does not match the other half

B: border: the edges of the mole are irregular, notched

C: color: the mole is not the same color all over – maybe shades of tan, brown, black, sometimes patches of red, blue or white...

D: diameter: the mole is wider than about ¼ inch (though doctors can identify smaller melanoma cancers...)

PREVENTION...

- Avoid the sun between 10 am and 4 pm
- Seek shade
- Slip on a shirt – long-sleeved, tightly woven fabric
- Slop on sunscreen with SPF or 15 or higher
- Slap on a wide brim hat to cover face, ears, neck
- Wear sunglasses with 99-100% UV ray absorption.