Skin cancer screening – An additional measure to prevention

The risk of skin cancer caused by sun exposure is not uncommon knowledge. However, many people associate this risk with beach holidays or leisure activities. It is important to note that the risk of developing skin cancer at work is high for those who spend considerable time working outdoors\(^1\). UV radiation from the sun is the leading cause of skin cancers such as melanoma\(^2\). Therefore, frequent occupational exposure to UV radiation can cause damage that is permanent and irreversible, regardless of your skin tone\(^3\).

Australian WHS legislation states that employers must protect their employees from excessive exposure to UV radiation to reduce the risk of skin cancer\(^4\),\(^5\). As a result, it is recommended that a comprehensive sun protection program is implemented, including measures such as workplace skin cancer screening. By implementing workplace skin cancer screening alongside other preventative measures, employers can minimise UV-related injuries and subsequent compensation claims.

The statistics – Occupational UV radiation

The case for sun protection at work in Australia is especially relevant considering the nation has one of the highest rates of skin cancer worldwide. It is estimated that two in three Australians will develop skin cancer by age 70, despite the disease being highly preventable\(^6\). According to research, UV damage in the workplace results in around 200 melanoma and 34,000 other skin cancer diagnoses each year. Consequently, 1,970 workers’ compensation claims were made in Australia between 2000 and 2012 for sun-related injury/disease, totalling $63 million. It is estimated that the actual incidence of work-related skin cancer is higher due to the time it takes for the cancer to develop\(^7\).

Skin cancer is caused by the damage of skin cells in the body. In a healthy person, cells grow, divide, die and are replaced under control. Cancer damages these cells and causes them to grow out of control.

Skin cancer prevention\(^8\)

As with everything health related, prevention is always better than cure. As part of this prevention, employers should introduce a variety of control measures that reduce exposure to identified UV hazards. Such measures can include both engineering and personal protective equipment control, e.g.:

- **Shade** – ensuring workers have access to shade, whether it be trees or portable structures, can reduce direct UV by 50 per cent.
- **Window tinting** – if your employees spend time in a vehicle, consider installing films to reduce the amount of UV transmitted into the cabin.
• **Clothing** – wearing long-sleeve shirts and trousers is the most effective barrier between the sun and your skin.
• **Hats** – a hat that shades not only the face and head, but also ears and neck.
• **Protective eye-wear** – quality sunglasses and/or safety glasses that offer UV protection.
• **Sunscreen** – only required on exposed skin such as the hands and face. Sunscreen use should be on top of the above control measures.

Cancer Council Australia recommends following five steps to keep employees safe in the sun:

1. Slip on covering clothing
2. Slop on SPF30 (or higher), broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen
3. Slap on a broad-brimmed hat
4. Seek shade
5. Slide on sunglasses

**How can KINNECT help?**

We offer a skin screening program that is a convenient, practical solution for employee occupational health and safety. We understand the costs associated with sending employees to a skin cancer clinic every year. Our specially trained medical practitioners (nurses and doctors) are equipped with the latest technology and will travel to your workplace regardless of its location. Each employee will be assessed individually and written referrals to a GP or specialist skin clinic will be provided where necessary.

The service is designed to increase productivity by minimising down time while ensuring the skin health of your employees. A comprehensive report, summarising results and providing recommendations for future strategies to mitigate sun exposure will be provided after the program is completed.

We will also encourage your employees to become familiar with their skin through regular at-home skin checks. Early detection of skin cancer is paramount for successful treatment. It is important to check for new or existing skin spots that may have changed in shape, size or colour. Any suspicious spots should be brought to the attention of a doctor. The bottom line is that skin examination does not prevent skin cancer. Consequently, it should be used as an effective complementary program to year-round protective measures.

**References**