

UW School of Medicine and Public Health: National group tackles sun addiction and other issues related to skin

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MADISON- A group of 19 experts from various disciplines said tanning addiction is one of five themes related to sun safety that must be addressed to lower rates of skin cancer in the United States. From 2007 to 2011, five million adults were diagnosed with skin cancer.

One of the panel members is Dr. Megan Moreno, associate professor of pediatrics at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. The group, organized by the National Academy of Sciences, met with the National Cancer Institute to share thoughts on sun exposure, knowledge gaps, implications for skin cancer risk and other health outcomes, and new directions for research and prevention. The paper was published in JAMA Dermatology.

Moreno said one of the emerging themes is excessive tanning behavior or tanning addiction.

“It’s time to recognize that tanning addiction exists and that it can be treated like other addictions, said Moreno. “In addition to having similar behavior parallels, tanning disorder has biological and genetic features like those seen in other substance and behavioral addictions.”

The group said there could be benefits to testing drug treatments that have been studied for other behavior and substance addictions. Moreno said primary-care physicians, dermatologists and other health care professionals are in a position to recognize excessive tanning behaviors and refer patients to screening for tanning disorder.

Other themes that were identified are:

Recognizing that sun safety is not one-size-fits-all. People with lighter skin are at-risk. People with dark skin may believe they don’t need sun protection.

Reducing risk for one disease should not come at the expense of increasing risk for another. Melanoma, for example, has been associated with outdoor physical activity. At the same time, physical activity could reduce the risk of developing other forms of cancer. Recognizing a need for nuanced messaging because of a diverse population in the U.S. Social-media platforms like Facebook and Twitter may provide “precision targeting” of messaging to various groups.

Creating scalability for sun safety interventions. To be successful with population-level cancer prevention, interventions will need scaling up to impact interventions that work on a lasting basis.

Moreno said future expert meetings should concentrate on sun protection in children ranging from the early years through the late teens.