Challenging Misperceptions About Melanoma

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Outcomes of the Dark Side of Tanning campaign for Cancer Institute NSW

TNS SocialResearch (TNSSR) has been working with the Cancer Institute NSW

Australia is the melanoma capital of the world â€“ one world title we canâ€™t be proud of! TNS Social Research (TNSSR) has been working with the Cancer Institute NSW on this important health issue.

The Problem
Melanoma of the skin is the fourth most common cancer in NSW and the second most common cancer in men. Although skin cancer is preventable by protecting the skin from harmful ultraviolet radiation (UVR), melanoma incidence has been increasing.(Tracey E, Baker D, Chen W, Stavrou E, Bishop J. Cancer in New South Wales: Incidence, Mortality and Prevalence 2005. Sydney: Cancer Institute NSW, November 2007).

Despite this risk, the Cancer Institute NSWâ€™s Lifestyle and Cancer Survey in 2006 found poor sun protection behaviours were widespread. Almost 60% of those surveyed reported getting sunburnt in the last 12 months, with more than 25% reporting that they were burnt more than three times within the last year. Young people reported higher incidences of burning. Notably 31% agreed they felt healthier with a suntan and despite widespread acknowledgement of the need to improve oneâ€™s sun protection behaviours, the risk of skin cancer was not perceived to be a serious personal threat.(Cotter T, Perez D, Dessaix A, Baker D, Murphy M, Crawford J, Denney J, Bishop JF. Cancer and Lifestyle Factors. Sydney: Cancer Institute NSW, December 2007).

The NSW Department of Healthâ€™s 2005 School Students Health Behaviours Survey also confirmed a decline in sun protection behaviours among school students in NSW.(Centre for Epidemiology and Research. New South Wales School Students Health Behaviours Survey: 2005 Report. Sydney: NSW Department of Health, 2007).

The Campaign
The Cancer Institute NSW developed the Dark Side of Tanning (DSOT) campaign to challenge the belief of young people that all skin cancers can be easily treated, and challenged the desirability of a tan. The campaign communicated the severity of melanoma as a health issue and the health consequences of unsafe exposure to the sun. The DSOT campaign ran from November 2007 to February 2008 targeting young people aged 13-17 and 18-24.

The DSOT advertisement features a young woman tanning on a beach and via an animation demonstrates how overexposure to UVR damages skin cells even before signs of burning. It shows how melanoma can spread through the body. The main advertising medium for the DSOT campaign was a 30-second television commercial launched in late November 2007 to coincide with National Skin Cancer Action Week and the beginning of summer.(The campaign also utilised radio, print and outdoor media. It was supported by an extensive digital strategy featuring a campaign website, display advertising and a paid search strategy).
Following a two week break in early December, it ran continuously from mid-December through late February 2008.

The Campaign Evaluation
CINSW (Cancer Institute NSW, Australia - Kate Purcell, Anita Dessaix, Donna Perez, Scott C Walsberger, Mayanne Lafontainea, Trish Cotter, James F Bishop) commissioned TNSSR (TNS Social Research, Sydney, Australia - Laurette Douglas, Sandra Eichhorn)Â to evaluate the campaign using online tracking. A pre-campaign survey was conducted in early November (n=405) followed by 13 weeks of tracking during the campaign (n=1314). The sample included NSW residents aged 13-44 years metropolitan and regional). A similar survey was conducted by TNSSR in 2006/07 providing a comparison.

The Results
Recognition Proven recall (unprompted awareness) of the DSOT advertisement peaked at 67% over the campaign period. Prompted awareness peaked at 88%, and was highest among women.

Message Takeout
The DSOT advertisement strongly communicated its key messages with nearly universal agreement that it â€˜stronglyâ€™ or

â€˜somewhatâ€™ gave the impression that â€˜melanoma only needs to be small to get into your bloodstream and spread to oth parts of your bodyâ€™ (94%); â€˜you donâ€™t have to burn to cause damage to your skin cellsâ€™ (94%); â€˜any level of tann damage and can lead to melanomaâ€™ (94%) and â€˜even if a melanoma is cut out it can reappear later in other parts of the bodyâ€™ (96%).

Involvement
Most respondents agreed that the DSOT advertisement â€˜is an effective sun protection/skin cancer adâ€™ (79%), that â€˜the a made me stop and thinkâ€™ (75%) and that â€˜the ad provided new information about how sun exposure causes melanomaâ€™ (72%).

Tanning
Nearly four in ten agreed that â€˜most of my friends think a suntan is a good thingâ€™ (39%) and â€˜a suntan makes me feel m attractive to othersâ€™ (38%). Just over a third also agreed that â€˜a suntan makes me feel better about myselfâ€™ (34%). Respondentsâ€™ attitudes toward tanning were assessed through a series of seven statements and a pro-tan score was calculated7.

From 2006/07 (39%) to 2007/08 (33%) a 6 point decline has been observed in the proportion who are pro-tan. Men and those aged 18-24 years were more likely to be pro-tan.

Behaviour â€“ action or intention
Six in ten (62%) indicated that they had increased or intended to increase their level of sun protection as a result of seeing the DSOT advertisement. A similar proportion (63%) indicated they were a little less or a lot less likely to suntan as a result of seeing the ad.

Conclusion
The Dark Side of Tanning campaign was developed to challenge the belief that a tan is healthy and to increase awareness of the severity of melanoma. It encouraged people to reconsider their attitudes and behaviours toward tanning and sun protection. The results show that the campaign was successful in meeting its objectives. Those surveyed in 2007/08 when the campaign was on air were less likely to desire a tan and to have pro-tan attitudes than those surveyed in 2006/07. Furthermore, six in 10 had increased or were planning to increase their level of sun protection in response to the campaign.

Acknowledgement
This summary is based on a Conference Poster prepared by the Cancer Institute NSW.

7Henry G.F.M, Reeder A.I, Gray A. Attitudes towards suntanning 1994-2003. Conference Paper.