



THE AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF DERMATOLOGISTS

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MEDIA RELEASE

MACHINES ARE MISSING SKIN CANCERS

Australia is the skin cancer capital of the world. The key to surviving this form of cancer is early detection and treatment. We are encouraged to have our skin checked regularly. A recent phenomenon is the use of computers as a potential aid to the diagnosis of melanoma. Advertisements for such machines have created the impression that they can diagnose melanomas. Is this true? Not according to Associate Professor John Kelly, a leading researcher in the field.

"At the moment these imaging machines are useful for storing images for later comparison during a check-up. Some machines will perform analyses of images of moles, but the value of these analyses remains to be established," explained Professor Kelly.

"Exaggerated claims about their capacity to detect melanoma are dangerously misleading," he warned. Some advertisements for these machines carried the claim that they are equal to a qualified dermatologist in detecting melanoma. "The machines themselves have no capacity to diagnose melanoma and merely provide information to aid the doctor. The value of this information remains unsubstantiated. I am concerned that people are being misled into relying on the assessment of an inexperienced practitioner, because he or she is using a machine. It is important for people to understand that the reliability of the diagnosis depends on the skills of the doctor and not on the machine."

Computers are unable to assess the 5% to 10% of melanomas that have no pigment, as well as a further 10% to 15% of melanomas that are of nodular growth pattern. Most have been developed to analyse only a narrow spectrum of moles and melanomas and are useless when applied to more common skin cancers and other benign skin spots, explained Professor Kelly.

When asked what someone should do if concerned about their moles, Professor Kelly replied, "The best person to see is your family doctor. They will check your skin and, if necessary, will refer you to a dermatologist. Your best chance is to make sure the person looking after you has the skills required."

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To arrange an interview, please contact:

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