



Organ transplant recipients at much higher risk of skin cancer

Strict attention to sun protective behaviour is necessary amongst organ transplant recipients, due to their much higher risk of developing skin cancer, according to speakers at the Australasian College of Dermatologists' 42nd Annual Scientific Meeting on the Gold Coast.

With the marked increase in the number of patients receiving new hearts, kidneys, lungs and livers, the issue of long-term development of skin cancers has come to the fore.

Australasian College of Dermatologists Honorary Secretary Dr Stephen Shumack says that Squamous Cell Carcinomas (SCCs) are the most common type of skin cancer in this group, and that they occur up to 100 times more frequently in organ transplant recipients than in the general population, while Basal Cell Carcinomas (BCCs) occur 10 times more often.

"Organ transplant recipients become immunosuppressed, which dramatically increases their likelihood of developing skin cancer," says Dr Shumack.

"The vast majority of Australians who receive an organ transplant will develop a skin cancer.

"In this group, skin cancers can often be fatal because immunosuppression means the patient is less able to resist the growth of the cancers, and the regular risk factors for the development of skin cancers are dramatically accelerated.

"The number of SCCs increases exponentially as time goes on after the transplant."

The mean interval between transplantation and the diagnosis of skin cancer is eight years in a 40 year old organ transplant recipient, and 3 years in a 60 year old organ transplant recipient.

"Potential organ transplant recipients should have a consultation with a dermatologist as soon as they become a candidate for transplant," says Dr Shumack.

"The sooner organ transplant recipients start protecting their skin against sun damage, the better the outcome for this group."

Dermatologist Dr Alvin Chong runs a dedicated transplant dermatology clinic at St Vincent's Hospital in Melbourne, located directly across the hallway from the transplant clinic.

"Our aim is to screen and educate patients about being sun-smart before their transplant," says Dr Chong.

"We've created a one-stop-shop for the diagnosis and treatment of skin cancers in transplant patients, and continue to encourage the necessary strict sun protective behaviour."

