



## Ethics of Skin Cancer Clinics In Question

Australia's leading professional organisation for the diagnosis and treatment of all skin diseases, the Australasian College of Dermatologists (ACD), has confirmed the alarming performance of skin cancer clinics in Australia.

The Honorary Secretary of the ACD, Dr Stephen Shumack, says that previously published articles have repeatedly shown that so-called 'skin cancer experts' in skin cancer clinics provide a service no more expert than the high quality service already provided by Australian general practitioners at three times the price.

"Past statistics and recent reports, as highlighted in today's news media reaffirm what we have been saying for a long time but generally we believe that many skin cancer clinics are more concerned with maximizing income than improving patient care", says Dr Shumack.

"Fifty-six percent of consultations at skin cancer clinics resulted in a skin biopsy, which is an exceptionally high rate. Worryingly, only 32% of these biopsies yield a non-melanoma skin cancer, indicating a very high level of unnecessary procedures (*MJA August 2006*)."

The seeming intent to maximise financial gain is most clearly demonstrated by an analysis of the procedures used to close excisions. Extraordinarily, skin cancer clinics perform what dermatologists regard as expensive and overly complicated techniques (skin flap repair) at a rate almost three times higher than highly trained dermatologists and specialist surgeons!

The skin flap repair technique presents higher risk of infection and scarring for many patients if not performed expertly, and is unnecessarily complicated for small skin cancer excisions.

"These figures highlight in dramatic fashion that skin cancer clinic procedures are not consistent with good clinical practice", says Dr Shumack. "We believe many skin cancer clinic practitioners are more concerned with maximising their practice income than improving patient care."

"If you do see a change in your skin, or choose to have an annual check up, the recommended procedure is to visit your general practitioner. If he or she has specific concerns then you may be referred to a specialist."

Dr Shumack says that having a referral is an important indication that you are visiting a recognised specialist, such as a dermatologist or surgeon, in the field of skin cancer diagnosis and treatment.

Visit [www.dermcoll.asn.au](http://www.dermcoll.asn.au) because 'You only get one skin'!

### MEDIA INQUIRIES

Dr Stephen Shumack  
Honorary Secretary  
The Australasian College of Dermatologists  
(02) 8765 0242

or

Karina Borg Olivier  
S2i Communications  
0405 438 074