BACKGROUND/SIGNIFICANCE

• Over 3.5 million cases of skin cancer are diagnosed every year (American Cancer Society [ACS], 2013).
• In adolescent females ages 15-19, melanoma is the second most common form of cancer (ACS, 2013).
• The greatest risk factor for skin cancer is ultraviolet (UV) rays from the sun (Howlader et al., 2012).
• Research has shown that sunscreen use is protective of all skin cancers, especially melanoma (Green, Williams, Logan, & Strutton, 2011).
• Over 50% of lifetime UV rays are obtained by age 18 (Stern, 2010).
• Young melanocytes are more active and therefore more susceptible to UV carcinogenesis and DNA cell alteration due to chronic, excessive sun exposure (Green, Wallingford, & McBride, 2011).

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study were:

• to explore perceptions of the risk of skin cancer and sunscreen use among 13- to 18-year-old adolescent female club soccer athletes
• to examine the relationship of risk perception to sunscreen use
• to ultimately use the resulting information to design an effective intervention to improve sunscreen use in this population.

RESULTS/DISCUSSION

• This study’s survey response rate was 33% - higher than other reported rates for mailed adolescent healthcare surveys (Church, 2013; Richards et al., 2010).
• Study findings suggested considerable differences in overall participant perceptions of skin cancer risk and in sunscreen use.
• Athletes who applied sunscreen before games were 2.4 times more likely to also apply sunscreen before practices.
• Significant positive correlations were found between sunscreen use and perceived susceptibility and benefit subscale scores as well as with parent and teammate encouragement to apply sunscreen.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study validate the need for sunscreen application education for this large, growing, sun-exposed female adolescent athlete population.

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