



## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Euromelanoma Day: Early treatment for skin cancer saves lives Europe-wide day of action offers free skin screening for everyone**

**(20 April 2007) Worldwide climate change and the way our leisure behaviour has altered are making skin cancer a more and more important topic. The rate of occurrence of new cases has been climbing steeply for a long time. In Europe over 50,000 people get an aggressive form of skin cancer (malignant melanoma) each year. The European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology (EADV) wants to draw attention to this problem with its Euromelanoma Campaign. The focus of the campaign is Euromelanoma Day, an Europe-wide day of action. On Euromelanoma Day, people in the participating countries can go to a dermatologist and have a free skin cancer examination. Interestingly, the number of participating countries in this prevention campaign has increased from less than 10 in the first years to over 20 in 2007.**

The aim of the campaign is to identify as many people as possible at an early stage of the disease so that they can be referred for successful treatment. "With the number of cases of melanoma increasing in many European countries, serial screening is a very effective measure for prevention and early identification", explained Prof. Andreas Katsambas, Chairman of the Euromelanoma Task Force. Such screening programmes often lead to a melanoma being identified at a stage in which the illness can be cured and the patient has a good chance of surviving.

#### **Screening for skin cancer since the turn of the century**

"Since the year 2000, dermatologists from 14 European countries have been organising skin cancer screening events of this kind. Their efforts have now grown into the Euromelanoma Screening Day Campaign. The campaign is desperately needed because skin cancer is developing into a major health problem" said Prof. Alberto Giannetti, President of EADV. It is estimated that, this year alone, malignant melanoma will strike around 54,000 people in Europe and 130,000 throughout the world. Every year about 37,000 people around the world die from malignant melanoma. The number of new cases is increasing by between three and seven per cent every year. Malignant melanoma occurs most frequently in the 40 – 60 age group. Women are more frequently affected than men.

#### **Skin never forgets**

"The skin forgets nothing – neither the first sunburn in childhood nor the constant UV irradiation on holiday" said Dr. Thomas Maselis of the Belgian Melanoma Task Force. Ultraviolet radiation damages the hereditary material of the skin cells, weakens the skin's local immune system and can lead to a general weakening of resistance. For a certain amount of time the body's own repair mechanisms mend this damage. But the skin has an almost life-long memory for UV radiation. One day the repair programme goes wrong and the immune system can no longer cope with the damage that has been caused. "This process is

responsible for premature ageing of the skin due to sunlight and can also lead to skin cancer with a delay of 15 - 40 years." explained Dr. Maselis. The more often it has experienced sunburn or exposure to intense sun, the more likely the skin is to succumb to skin cancer. The sun-tan generally accepted as an ideal of beauty is actually not a sign of health but a sign of skin damage due to ultraviolet radiation.

### **Children with sunburn at particular risk of skin cancer**

Prevention of skin cancer starts at birth. "Protect your children" advise the EADV's dermatologists. Anyone who often gets sunburnt in their childhood and youth has an up to 50 times higher risk of developing melanoma later on. „Babies and small children should not be exposed to any direct sun at all because their skin has not yet developed any protection" explained Dr. Maselis. Older children should still play mainly in the shade and wear a sun-hat and dark coloured sun-proof clothing.

### **Early diagnosis means straightforward treatment**

Early diagnosis of skin cancer is just as important as prevention. A tumour that is found early enough can usually be treated quickly and without complications. In the advanced stage treatment is much more difficult. "If the tumour is less than one millimetre thick, a small operation is enough – the suspect tissue is removed and the patient is completely cured." explained Dr. Esther de Vries of the Erasmus University Medical Centre in Rotterdam. However, the life expectancy decreases with increasing tumour thickness. Where tumours are over four millimetres thick, only four out of ten patients can be saved in spite of additional treatment after the operation.

### **Non-melanoma skin cancer is even more common**

Non-melanoma skin cancers are less aggressive than melanoma but at least ten times more frequent. They include basal cell and squamous cell carcinoma and the precancerous actinic keratosis. Non-melanoma skin cancer is the most frequent form of skin cancer. It occurs where the skin has had intensive exposure to the sun – such as on the head, face, backs of the hands and lower arms. Non-melanoma skin cancer often grows over a period of years without causing any symptoms. If it is not treated it forces its way into the tissue and destroys the structures below. Actinic keratosis (solar keratosis) is particularly common. It affects one out of every two people aged over 60. The children being born today have an almost 100 per cent probability of developing non-melanoma skin cancer later on.

### **Screening improves early diagnosis**

"With Euromelanoma Day we want to alert the public to the dangers of the sun's effects and at the same time enable as many people as possible to undergo free skin cancer screening with the dermatologist of their choice" explained Dr. Klaus Fritz, chairman of the EADV's Media and PR Committee. This will make it possible to identify people with skin cancer risk factors and early stages of melanoma or other forms of skin cancer. EADV President-Elect and Chairman of the Euromelanoma Task Force, Prof. Katsambas, said: "We are confident that this important screening event can become a major European health campaign against all forms of skin cancer and that it can lead to a significant reduction in the number of new cases in Europe."

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