



Department of Health

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

HOWARD A. ZUCKER, M.D., J.D.
Commissioner

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Executive Deputy Commissioner

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Dear Colleague:

Thank you for taking time to read my June letter. In honor of Father's Day, I'd like to discuss two health topics important for men: skin cancer and prostate health.

Skin cancer: Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the United States, with more than two million new cases every year. Skin cancer most often develops on skin exposed to ultraviolet (UV) radiation, both from the sun or indoor tanning. Men, particularly white men, are more likely than women to get skin cancer. Whether for work or recreation, men tend to spend more hours in the sun than women, but are less likely to use sunscreen. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that about 43% of women report regular use of sunscreen on the face, compared to 18% of men.

In New York, more than 3,700 people are diagnosed annually with melanoma, the most deadly form of skin cancer. Both men and women are at risk for melanoma, but men are more likely to die from it. In a recent study, researchers found that men diagnosed between the ages of 15 and 39 were 55% more likely to die from melanoma than females diagnosed with melanoma in the same age group.

The good news is that skin cancer is one of the most preventable forms of cancer. The warm weather is a perfect time to help patients reduce their risk for melanoma and other types of skin cancer. Remind patients to protect themselves from UV radiation by using broad-spectrum sunscreens with an SPF of at least 15; wearing protective eyewear, a wide-brimmed hat, long-sleeved shirts and long pants; and avoiding direct sun between 10 am and 4 pm when the sun is at its strongest. Recommend taking these preventive measures even on cloudy days. And as you already know, during regular physical exams, clinicians should ask patients if they have noticed any changes in moles on their skin and look for atypical moles (asymmetry, border irregularity, color variability, or a diameter greater than 6 mm). If found, advise patients to see a dermatologist.

UV radiation can also come from tanning devices such as tanning beds, tanning booths and sun lamps. Any time of year, providers can remind patients that everyone should avoid indoor tanning devices.

Prostate health: Prostate cancer is the second most common cancer among men in New York. That's why talking to your male patients about prostate health is important. Many men don't know where the prostate is located, what its functions are, and the symptoms that may suggest problems.

Prostate cancer occurs mainly in older men, with about two-thirds of cases diagnosed in men age 65 and older. Prostate cancer occurs more often in black men, who, in New York, are one and a half times more likely to get prostate cancer and almost twice as likely to die of the disease compared to white men.

Older men are also at risk for an enlarged prostate or benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH). BPH is common and cannot be prevented. In fact, about 90% of men over 80 will have BPH. An enlarged prostate can cause difficulties with urination, particularly as men age. Additionally, the symptoms for prostate cancer and BPH can be similar, so it is important to begin a conversation with your patients about prostate health, and to discuss the risks and benefits of prostate cancer screening.

I hope you will take the opportunity to talk to your male patients whenever possible about these important health issues. I wish all fathers a Happy Father's Day, and hope you are enjoying a nice start to your summer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Howard Zucker M.D.". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "Z" and "U".

Howard A. Zucker, M.D., J.D.