

Melanoma in the news

A discourse analysis on articles in The Australian newspaper

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Overview

- Melanoma Epidemiology
- Risk Factors & Pathogenesis
- Methods
- Results – Main themes identified
- Discussion
- Limitations
- Implications
- Reflection – understanding of Public Health



The Paper



- Objectives
 - Analyse and synthesise articles discussing melanoma
 - Extract dominant ideologies & attitudes
 - Obtain a snap shot of discourses informing public perceptions of melanoma

The Paper



- Thematic discourse analysis on articles
 - *The Australian* between 2000 - 2015
 - Revealed negative discourse
 - Genetic factors beyond the individual's control
 - Very poor prognosis
 - Managed with experimental pharmaceuticals

Epidemiology - Australia



- 4th most commonly diagnosed cancer - 11,057 annually
- 2012 - 22, 800 DALYs
 - 17,200 due to premature death
- Highest annual incidence - 49.8 cases / 100, 000 (recently NZ took over)
 - U.S.A 14.2 (California 18.5)
 - U.K 12.5

Why public health messages matter in melanoma discourse

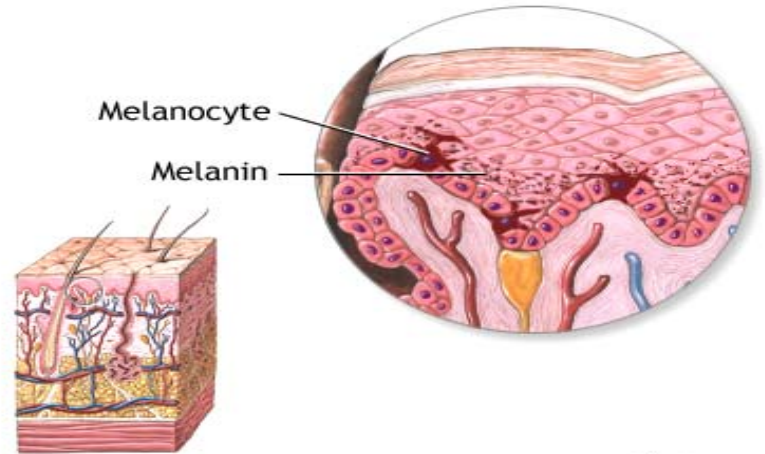


- Aware of effective and inexpensive preventative measures and interventions
 - sun block, sunglasses, hats and shade seeking behaviours
- Impact of such interventions is largely dependent on public perceptions of melanoma
- Success of public health messages is influenced by the communication and transfer of information from Dr's to pt's



What is melanoma?

- Melanocytes are found in the basal layer of the epidermis
- Melanin
 - Protein - protects skin cells by absorbing UVR
- Melanoma
 - Uncontrolled proliferation of melanocytic stem cells that have undergone genetic transformation



Risk Factors & Pathogenesis



1. **Genetic** - 10% of melanomas are familial, 2% attributable to rare high penetrance genes
2. **Environmental** ~80% of melanomas develop in intermittently sun exposed areas. UVA & UVB damage.
3. **Phenotypic manifestations of gene-environment interactions** e.g atypical melanocytic naevi, Ephelides & Solar lentigines

Methods - Discourse Analysis



- Qualitative research methodology
- Examines frames of communication at the “meta” level to identify thematic patterns and trends
- Socio-political ideologies and belief systems are sculpted by the words and rhetorical devices used in texts

Methods



- Systematic search - EBSCO host Newspaper Source Plus
- *The Australian* newspaper
- Articles 2000 – 2015
- Keyword “melanoma” in the heading
- Retrieved 19 articles
- Each article closely read & assessed for the presence of dominant themes and connotations.
- Three main themes were deciphered through critical appraisal of textual content and literary techniques employed to convey meaning.
- **Close attention paid to the degree to which public health messages regarding melanoma and sun exposure were evident as a subtextual theme.**

Results



Three dominant discourses:

- 1) New pharmaceutical agents
- 2) Melanoma - a terribly morbid prognosis
- 3) Genetic predisposition, Metastasis & disease trajectory

1. New Experimental Rx



- 53% (10/19) articles centered on breakthrough pharmaceutical developments

“ Exclusive breakthrough melanoma drug”

“Shrank brain tumours in 90% of patients.”

- Diction suggestive of a one-to-one ratio of effect

“The drugs attack a mutated protein called BRAF, specific to melanoma cells, causing them to die, while sparing normal cells.”

- Agents – vemurafenib, ipilimumab, pembrolizumab

2. Poor prognosis of melanoma

- 42% (8/19) articles strongly alluded to the significant mortality of the disease
- Life expectancy of those with metastatic disease
 - *“six to ten months”*
 - *“the chances of 2 year survival being 10-20 per cent”*

Cresswell, A. New drug can double melanoma survival, *The Australian*, 24/02/2012.

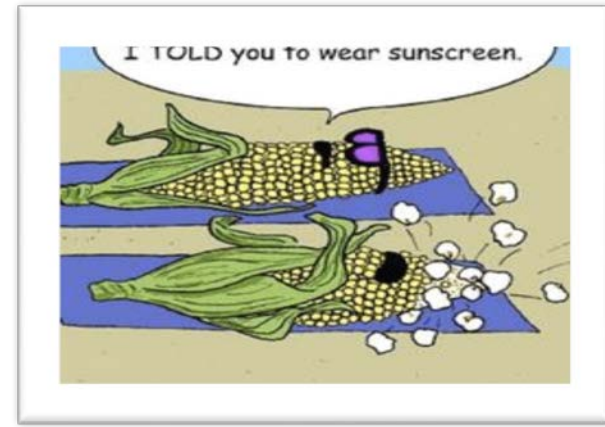
Cresswell, A. Successful anti-melanoma drug approved for distribution, *The Australian*, 15/07/2011.

3. Genetic predisposition & disease process



- 63% (12/19) focused on mechanisms of disease at the familial genetic level
- 6/12 focused on the role of genetic susceptibility & gene mutation
 - *“Gene puts 200,000 at risk of melanoma”*
- Gene mutations
 - BRAF (which is in fact acquired V600E)

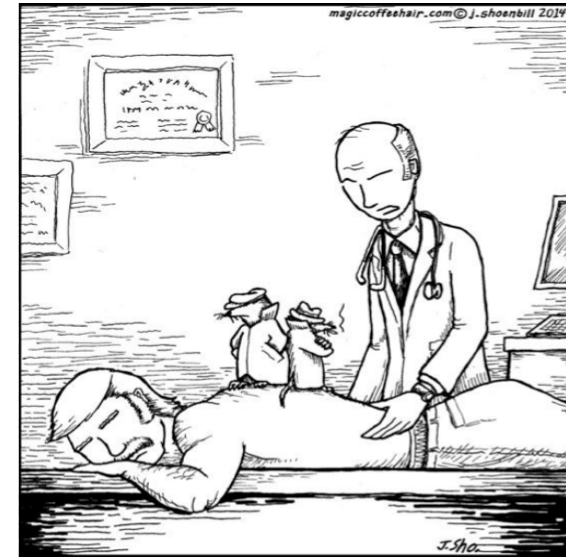
Reference to Public Health messages



- Primary measures were not the feature of any article.
- No reference made to skin checks.
- 3/19 conveyed some vague and indirect public health message or educational information.
- The word "sun" appeared in only two articles.

Discussion

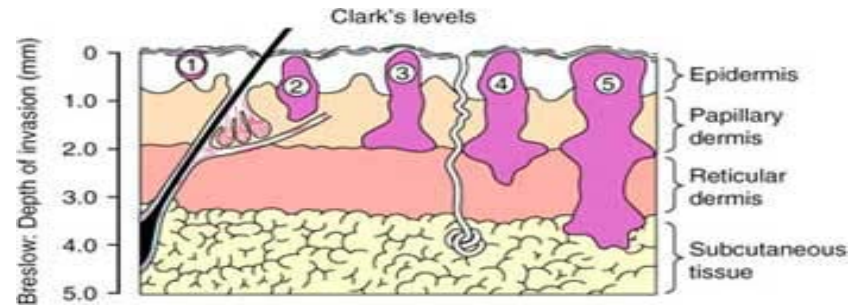
- Driven by 3^o measures
 - Novel experimental pharmaceuticals
- Negated importance of early diagnosis
- No dialogue concerning 1^o & 2^o interventions
 - Behavioural modification
 - Skin checks
- Failure to explicitly connect sun exposure as the 1^o modifiable RF with MM



"You were smart to come see me, Mr. Lewis.
These moles on your back definitely look suspicious."

Reality vs Discourse

- Sinister media presentation of melanoma
 - However prognosis good when caught early
- Overall 5 year survival rate
 - ♀ 93% & ♂ 87%
- Stage IV disease (visceral metastases)
 - 9% five year survival
- Prognosis
 - Breslow thickness
 - Ulceration
 - Sentinel lymph node status
 - Local invasion
 - Distant metastases



Limitations

- Only appraised articles from one publication
- One snap shot of time
- Not necessarily indicative of what the wider public reads
- Does not indicate how members of the public reading these articles react to this discourse or how it might alter their behavior.
- In 2015 *The Australian* readership - 663,000,
 - 333,000 aged over 50

NB Daily Telegraph 599,000, SMH 724,000

Implications


- Results could be used to stimulate or re-ignite discussion among the profession about the implications of unbalanced information
- Does the public health profession have a responsibility in this area?
- What drives health stories in the media?



Reflection



- Great impact on my own understanding of public health messages, vehicles & research methods.
- Self learning - how to conduct a discourse analysis, via reading multiple examples and applying methods of analysis to my own evaluation of texts.
- Enhanced my appreciation of AFPHM competencies:
 - Methods of health promotion and disease prevention
 - Research and evaluation
 - Cultural understanding



IF YOU DON'T READ
THE NEWSPAPER, YOU
ARE UNINFORMED; IF
YOU DO READ THE
NEWSPAPER, YOU ARE
MISINFORMED.

- MARK TWAIN

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