

The Hairstylist Melanoma Challenge

BY SANDY ALLTEN, RN, OCN, CCRP

Though recent improvements in metastatic melanoma treatment are encouraging, we know that prevention or detection at an early stage remains the ultimate goal with this potentially deadly skin cancer.

In 2017 Neda R. Black, MD, published a research report in *JAMA Dermatology* on the promising work she and others had done educating hairdressers on the “ABCDE’s”—a set of standardized criteria to detect melanoma—of the scalp, head, and neck.¹ As an oncology nurse, this innovative approach made so much sense to me. Who knows your head better than your hairdresser? If your hairdresser received training in the detection of skin cancers of the scalp, head, and neck, he or she could become the first line in detection.

First Contact

I reached out to Eyes on Cancer (eyesoncancer.org), an educational program developed by SkyMD, Inc., which collaborated on Dr. Black’s project. SkyMD is a telemedicine-driven company that allows patients to upload photos of skin disorders to an online platform where a board-certified dermatologist can diagnose, propose treatment, and may even prescribe medication. Eyes on Cancer was founded by a husband and wife team, health professional Dean Foster, MD, and beauty professional Jeanne Braa Foster, who both knew that a collaboration between the health and beauty world could be beneficial. Its mission is to educate beauty professionals about skin cancer detection. The Fosters were extremely inspiring and introduced me by phone to their dynamic program manager Yvette

Williams, who now runs the Eyes on Cancer program.

I learned that Eyes on Cancer provides a 20-minute online educational video about the different types of skin cancer with photos of each kind, a melanoma lesion photo reference card within the video, and an online 35-question post-test. When finished, hairdressers can print and display a certificate of completion in their salon.

The Eyes on Cancer video emphasizes that it is not the role of the hairdresser to diagnose skin cancer. The only goal is awareness. If a suspicious lesion is spotted, hairdressers are asked to encourage their client to follow up with a physician or dermatologist to get it checked out. Hairdressers can also offer to take a photo of the lesion if it is in a place that the client cannot see, like the back of the head or neck.

Passing It On

I decided to spread the word starting with my own hairdresser. I watched the video and then gave the link to my hairdresser, Lisa Lowe Gaddis, to complete. She agreed to watch it and has since become a wonderful ambassador for the training. She saved the photo page of skin cancer examples to her smart phone for easy reference when she is on the job. Lisa’s family has been touched by cancer and she is proud to participate in this program.

“Saving lives is always in style,” she says. Lowe Gaddis mentions that her clients tell her that they are not only grateful for a great haircut, they are thankful that she is looking out for their skin health, too. “Our clients know that we care about them ... not just their hair,” says Lowe Gaddis.

The idea for the Hairstylist Melanoma Challenge began in December 2018. It was easy for my hairdresser and I to participate in the Eyes on Cancer online class, quiz, and certification. If we could do it so quickly and easily, why not engage others to do it by challenging them on social media? I presented this idea to my local Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) chapter and to my employers at AdventHealth. Both groups enthusiastically endorsed the project. I thought the good-natured social media challenge of the successful ALS “Ice Bucket Challenge” would be a good model to adopt.

Setting the Challenge

Eyes on Cancer typically charges \$10 for each hairdresser to take the class. AdventHealth Cancer Institute Daytona Beach applied for and received a grant from the Bill Walter III Melanoma Research Fund to pay for free unlimited use of the online program passcode (ONCRN) so that no one participating in the program would have to pay. The goal of this grant is to use the well-established Eyes on Cancer educational program to train as many hairdressers, oncology nurses, and AdventHealth staff members as possible.

Our next move was determining how we could spread the word about the Eyes on Cancer program. We engaged my local ONS chapter and AdventHealth employees to act as conduits to spread the word about the Hairstylist Melanoma Challenge. Eyes on Cancer would then document the numbers of hairdressers trained with our code.

The board of our local ONS Chapter, East Central Florida ONS, worked with our cancer program staff to make this a chapter mission project. ONS members were

encouraged to watch the video and take the test. Then, they were tasked with giving a coupon code to their own hairdresser for free registration to the online class. The hope was that once we engaged the hairdressers in our region to participate in the challenge, we would inspire other ONS chapters around the country to do the same.

AdventHealth Daytona's marketing department championed our cause and spread the word about the Hairstylist Melanoma Challenge in local newspapers and TV coverage. The East Central Florida ONS chapter reached out to other chapter presidents in northern Florida to join in the challenge.

To encourage participation, we designed our own challenge website (HairstylistMelanomaChallenge.com) and Facebook page (facebook.com/cancernursesandhairdressersunite).

We originally thought that by having participants post a selfie with their certificate on our Facebook page, the challenge would catch on quickly. We have since found that people are participating but not always posting. Each month Eyes on Cancer gives us the name of all participants who use our code, so we can post those on our Facebook page.

At AdventHealth Daytona, we are following up the momentum of this challenge by offering a free skin cancer screening to all members of our community, including those hairdressers whom we have met through this project. In addition to benefiting our community, the Hairstylist Melanoma Challenge has brought programmatic benefits as well: AdventHealth Daytona is using the combination of the challenge and free skin screening as one of its community outreach projects for Commission on Cancer accreditation.

Gaining Momentum

I presented a poster on the Hairstylist Melanoma Challenge at the 2019 ONS Congress and received great feedback. Over and over we heard, "What a great idea!" Patty Higgins, RN, OCN, in Indiana heard about our project and immediately took the

Eyes on Cancer video class. She then started training beauty school students in her town. This is our dream in action.

There are currently 39,000 ONS nurses. If each ONS nurse encouraged his or her own hairdresser to participate, the numbers would be staggering. With approximately 39,000 hairdressers seeing potentially 6 to 12 clients per day, we could be affecting positive change in hundreds of thousands of people daily.

We are slowly contacting ONS chapter presidents around the country to see whether they are interested in joining the Hairstylist Melanoma Challenge. We urge ONS national to help us spread the word about this mission. Imagine what we could accomplish as a collective.

We continue to urge friendly competition between salons and have started to share our Hairstylist Melanoma Challenge at local beauty school programs. For example, we have had a wonderful response watching

the video and talking about melanoma with the students of Daytona College.

Eyes on Cancer has educated more than 10,000 participants through its online video and test combination. The Hairstylist Melanoma Challenge has added 150 participants to that number in 2019. Eyes on Cancer's goal is to have 20,000 participants educated by the end of 2020.

We invite ACCC members to join us! Please go to our website, enter the free code, watch the video, take the quiz, and then encourage others to join the challenge, too. Thirty minutes of your time could save a life, and saving lives is ALWAYS in style.

Sandy Allten, RN, OCN, CCRP, is a research coordinator at AdventHealth Daytona Beach.

Reference

1. Black NR, O'Reilly GA, Pun S, Black DS, Woodley DT. Improving hairdressers' knowledge and self-efficacy to detect scalp and neck melanoma by use of an educational video. *JAMA Dermatol.* 2018;154(2):214-216.