

MEDIA RELEASE:

Lions Cancer Institute screening program a roaring success

Community groups could prove lifesavers by helping in early skin cancer detection.

The role of screening programs has been highlighted in a study led by Heather A. Williams of the School of Population Health, University of Western Australia.

The researchers looked at the skin cancer screening program administered by the Lions Cancer Institute (LCI) of Western Australia. It involved a questionnaire advertised through local media channels and an invitation to a free follow-up skin cancer evaluation.

The screening program has been found to be effective in both getting people to attend free screenings and in detecting malignant melanomas.

The study examines the socio-demographic characteristics of people attending LCI skin cancer screenings collected from 6,000 surveys between 1996 and 2003. It ranks attendees by sex, age, country of birth, education level and occupation.

“This study was a cheap and effective way to analyse the effectiveness of a free community-based cancer screening program. We’ve shown that this Lions-backed initiative helps save lives,” Ms Williams said.

One surprising finding is that the LCI cancer screening program attracts an unusually high proportion of males (43%), both by national and international standards.

“We feel that this is due to the association between the screening program and the Lions Club, whose other activities and events involve predominantly men,” Ms Williams said.

The LCI program’s high cancer detection rate (three melanomas for every 1,000 people screened) is one of the highest reported by a skin cancer screening program. The study partly attributes this to the effective checklist that alerts individuals to their cancer risk and invites them to attend a free cancer screening.

The study’s outcomes, published in the February issue of Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health, can have far-reaching implications for the establishment and running of cancer screening programs all over Australia.

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