



You may recall that the QSkin Study was launched in January 2011, when most of Queensland was deluged by rain and swamped by floods. It is difficult to believe that just two years after the 2011 disasters, many Queenslanders have faced further heartbreak from cyclonic winds and flooding rain. The QSkin team sends our best wishes to everyone affected by these events, and hopes that 2013 is free from further upsets. In this edition of QSkin News we bring updates on the study, important information about new study developments and some brief snippets of our plans for 2013. Thank you again for taking part in this important research.

David Whiteman and Catherine Olsen
Principal Investigators of QSkin

Study progress

In the past few months the QSkin team has been busy analysing the information on the treatment of keratinocyte skin cancers (basal cell carcinoma (BCC) and squamous cell carcinoma (SCC)) among QSkin participants. This has been made possible by linking data from consenting participants with Medicare Australia records. These analyses show that in the first year of follow-up, **2832** QSkin participants had surgery to remove a BCC or SCC.

Because the Medicare records do not provide important pathology information to confirm the diagnosis, we are now in the process of checking the pathology records. This process will take some time, but further information will follow!

Study progress

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Congratulations!

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New Funding Application

We have been busy preparing a funding application for a new project to gather genetic information. If successful, we will invite each QSkin participant to provide a saliva sample. These samples will contain all of the genetic materials necessary for us to see how genes vary for different people, and how they might be related to risks of skin cancer.

Update on the food questionnaire



As mentioned in our last newsletter, we will soon be inviting you to complete a **food questionnaire**. There is very little up-to-date information about whether modern-day diets affect skin cancers risks, so we plan to investigate.

Our team of nutritionists is excited to be joining us in this project, and they are now developing a novel approach to assess your usual food intake online. Working closely with QIMR's Information Technology department, the nutrition team is well-advanced in preparing your web-based food questionnaire. This part of our research will contribute a great deal towards knowledge of the role of nutrition in preventing skin cancers and we look forward to your participation.

Follow-up

Our sincere thanks go out to everyone who responded to our request for missing or incomplete information from their baseline survey. We have had a fantastic response to our request for missing birth dates and Medicare Numbers.



Congratulations!

QSkin Investigator **Adèle Green** **AC** has been named **Queen-sland's Australian of the Year 2013** in



recognition of her enormous contributions to skin cancer research. As Head of Cancer and Population Studies at QIMR, Adèle has been at the frontline of melanoma and skin cancer research for more than 20 years. Her earlier research in the long-running Nambour Skin Cancer Prevention Trial proved that daily use of sunscreen halved the risk of squamous cell cancers (SCC) of the skin and set the benchmark for prevention research. More recently, Adèle has focused on factors affecting survival following a diagnosis of melanoma. Adèle has also been recognized for her contribution to public health including Indigenous health and her leadership in the wider scientific community. Congratulations Adèle!

News snippets—new developments in skin cancer research

Genetic defect spreads cancer

Scientists at QIMR, in conjunction with Yale University in the US, have identified a new gene mutation in almost 10% of melanoma cases, paving the way for the development of new treatments.

Professor Nick Hayward, from QIMR's Oncogenomics Laboratory, said the abnormality in the *RAC1* gene was involved in the spread of the cancer. The mutation was almost exclusively found in melanomas from sun-exposed body sites and has the telltale hallmarks of being caused by exposure to ultraviolet radiation.

"This latest research brings us a step closer towards the ultimate goal of personalized medicine, which is where each patient is treated with the most appropriate drug to combat their own particular tumour," Professor Hayward said. The study was published in *Nature Genetics*.

QSkin sub-studies

The cost of treating skin cancers

In the coming months Dr Louisa Gordon and Dr David Rowell of the Centre for Applied Health Economics (CAHE) at Griffith University will be conducting an economic evaluation of the effect that sunlight has on the costs to the health system of treating the keratinocyte skin cancers. The researchers will use de-identified data from the QSkin study to conduct the analyses.

Past research has shown that skin cancers cost the Australian health budget more than any other cancers. However, those earlier studies only looked at population costs and could not assess how much the costs varied for different individuals. By using the de-identified QSkin data, the economics researchers will be able to determine the range of costs borne by people in the community, which should give new insights into the measures needed to support people with skin cancer.



QSkin Smartphone Study



As we have mentioned in past newsletters, from time to time we will be contacting small groups of QSkin participants to invite them to take part in sub-studies to address specific research questions. We are currently inviting a group of QSkin participants to take part in a study being conducted by Associate Professor Monika Janda from the Queensland University of Technology (QUT). This sub-study aims to assess whether new technology, a mobile "dermatoscope", as pictured here, can help with early detection of melanoma.

You may receive a letter inviting you to take part. If you would like to participate, just return the reply form to us and we will pass your contact details on to the QUT study team.



Solarium ban

Victoria has become the latest state to ban commercial solariums in an effort to reduce skin cancer rates. The ban will be enforced from 31 December 2014, as part of the government's new skin cancer prevention framework. South Australia and New South Wales have already announced a ban on sunbeds from the same date. Queensland Health Minister, Lawrence Springborg said he

had major concerns about solariums and was also moving towards "a full ban".

No solarium can provide a safe tan. The link between UV radiation and skin cancer is well established. Exposing your skin to UV radiation produced by a solarium increases your risk of developing skin cancer, eye cancers and other skin and eye damage.

New Research on Vitamin D

Associate Professor **Rachel Neale**, QSkin associate investigator, has recently been awarded funding to carry out Australia's **largest trial of vitamin D supplementation**. She'll be recruiting approximately 25,000 Australian adults to take part in this exciting research which we urgently need to help us better understand vitamin D.

You've no doubt heard a lot in the media about vitamin D and how it is important for our health. In fact, while we know that vitamin D is important for our bone health, we actually don't know how much we need in our blood. It is possible that having optimal vitamin D levels is also important for reducing our risk of diseases like cancer and cardiovascular disease but this is by no means certain. To add to the confusion, there are many unanswered questions about how much sun different people need at different times of the year and in different parts of Australia to produce vitamin D.

So – what should you do? Cancer Australia's guidelines suggest that, all year round, Queenslanders are exposed to enough sun to produce vitamin D in the skin. In summer, a few minutes a day should be enough for most people. In winter, you might need a little longer, but usually not more than 15-20 minutes. You are better off exposing more of your body for a smaller amount of time rather than just your hands and face for a longer time. And it's better for vitamin D production to be physically active in the sun – so head out for a walk.

Finally, be aware of the UV index. If it's more than three you should be taking sensible precautions to protect your skin from the sun.

Feedback?

If you have any comments or updated information (e.g. change of address), please contact us:

Tel: 1800 222 600 **Email:** qskin@qimr.edu.au **Web:** www.qskin.qimr.edu.au

If you have received this newsletter by post but would rather receive it electronically, please [email us](mailto:qskin@qimr.edu.au) with your contact details.



Queensland Institute of
Medical Research

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