

Skin cancer screening saves lives

Regarding your report "Officials urge residents to protect their skin from the sun's rays" (July 31), the article refers to the report by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force which suggested that published evidence does not yet support full body skin cancer screening for all individuals.

A patient of mine with a history of skin cancer sent me the article, asking whether he really needed to keep his next appointment.

Whether skin cancer screening is needed for every American may not yet be clear. But it is important to recognize that the recommendations from this report do not apply to the many people who are already known to have an elevated risk of skin cancer.

People at elevated risk include those who have been diagnosed with a skin cancer or a pre-cancer in the past; those with a family history of melanoma or non-melanoma skin cancer; those with atypical moles (usually brown skin lesions with variations in color, shape, size or symmetry); or those whose immune systems are suppressed by illness or medications.

Nor do the recommendations address the many people who on their own, or with the help of friends or family, have noted a skin lesion that looks suspicious. Such people should seek dermatologic care.

More than 5 million basal cell and squamous cell carcinoma skin cancers will be diagnosed in America this year, and more than 10,000 people are expected to die from malignant melanoma.

If you or a loved one is at elevated risk for skin cancer, this report does not take you off the hook. Your regular visits are still important.

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