Among non-Hispanic whites, early detection of melanoma has enhanced survival. Despite the epidemiologic evidence that these populations merit increased attention, the US Hispanic and African-American populations are rarely the focus of melanoma screening research studies. The Skin Cancer Awareness Outreach Program is an educational initiative that has taken a twofold approach towards tackling this developing healthcare disparity.

BACKGROUND

- Although age-adjusted incidence rates (per 100,000) for melanoma are lower among Hispanics and blacks (4.5 and 1.0, respectively) compared with white non-Hispanics (21.6), melanomas among minority populations in the United States are more likely to metastasize and have poorer outcomes.
- U.S. Census projections predict that the Hispanic population in the U.S. will nearly triple in the 50 years from 2000 to 2050 from 35.3 million to 102.6 million. This impending demographic shift has strong implications for healthcare providers, policy, and research. Despite the epidemiologic evidence that this population merits increased attention, the US Hispanic population is rarely the focus of melanoma screening research. Numerous studies have established that there is a perception of a low-risk level of melanoma incidence in Hispanic and African-American US patient populations.
- Because of the low index of suspicion in both the medical community and among members of these ethnic populations, diagnosis is often delayed, resulting in advanced presentation and a poorer prognosis. The high rates of thick melanoma at the time of diagnosis among Hispanics and the suboptimal prevention efforts with Hispanics strongly reinforce the need for increased public health efforts to increase the frequency and efficacy of skin cancer screening exams.
- Among non-Hispanic whites, early detection of melanoma has enhanced survival from 68% in the early 1970's to 92% in recent years. However, Hispanic and black patients have benefited less from early detection. In Florida, the proportion of distant-stage melanoma diagnosed among Hispanics and blacks remained stable from 1990 to 2004 compared with a steady decrease in the percentage of melanoma cases diagnosed at distant stage among non-Hispanic whites.

METHODS

My ongoing community service project has taken a twofold approach towards tackling this developing healthcare disparity, as outlined below:

1) Healthcare Professional Skin Cancer Screening Education:
- Despite this overwhelming evidence suggesting that all future physicians can benefit from skin cancer detection education, the great majority of medical schools in the US currently do not incorporate skin cancer screening checks into their UME curriculum. Recognizing this glaring need, one of the components of this community service project is the "Educational Intervention" in which I teach my medical student colleagues how to incorporate an "Integrated" skin exam into their routine history & physical examinations.

2) Community Melanoma Awareness Education (Particularly in Minority Populations):
- Additional efforts need to be made to correct prevailing misconceptions about skin cancer, particularly among members of minority populations. Focused efforts need to be made to raise awareness about melanoma within the community. I host educational seminars, which provide free nutritional and skin cancer awareness education to University area patients and their families. The health seminars teach patients about what they can do to minimize their risk of developing melanoma, in addition to debunking the myths that minority patients are incapable of developing skin cancer. Those who attend the seminars are also taught how to conduct skin checks on themselves and others.

PROJECT SITES: TAMPA BAY AREA

The Tampa Bay area has proven to be the ideal location to implement this community service project, due to its large population of migrant workers present in the area. These migrant workers are at an exceptionally high risk of developing melanoma, thereby making them excellent candidates for this educational intervention.

RESULTS

- Overall, the skin cancer awareness outreach program has enjoyed tremendous success over the course of the last two years. The educational seminars were so well received that we expanded our educational outreach efforts. For example, in addition to lecturing medical students, we also lecture at local hospitals, clinics, and health fairs.
- The scope of dermatologists alone is inadequate to identify all cases of melanoma early enough to ensure a positive patient outcome with early enough treatment. One of the factors that motivates me to continue with this educational initiative is the belief that society can benefit greatly if we expand the scope of melanoma surveillance beyond the limited reach of dermatologists alone. I feel this will be possible by establishing a referral pipeline in which healthcare providers of all backgrounds (equipped with knowledge about how melanoma presents) can direct patients with suspicious looking skin lesions to either primary care physicians or dermatologists for appropriate management.
- Looking towards the future, I am optimistic that this outreach program will continue to celebrate its current level of success and that it will demonstrate sustainability for years to come. In order to do so, it is paramount that we expand our melanoma awareness educational efforts by actively targeting groups that historically have not been reached, such as migrant workers in the community. By doing so, we can effectively create another opportunity for early incidental identification of suspicious looking skin lesions.

REFERENCES

- Hsu, S; Staats-Venti, RM; Parker, DF; Kirsner, RS. Comparison of Stage at Diagnosis of Melanomas Among Hispanics, Black, and White Patients in Miami-Dade County, Florida. Arch Dermatol. 2006;142(4):704–708.

TWO YEAR SUMMARY

- Year 1:
  - Ongoing skin cancer awareness lecture series initiated
  - Educational seminars were directed towards medical students and members of the University area community
- Year 2:
  - Skin cancer awareness educational seminars incorporated into health fairs throughout the Tampa Bay Area
  - BRIDGE (free, student-run) Healthcare Clinic has now begun to offer free dermatologic services