

Heat on sunbeds Embargoed to March 10, 2011

Craig Sinclair, Director of the Cancer Prevention Education at Cancer Council Victoria and author of the World Health Organisation's report on sunbeds, is speaking at a forum in Wellington today on the need for sunbed regulation/legislation in New Zealand. The forum is hosted by the Melanoma Network of NZ (MelNet) a network of health professionals working in melanoma.

Key stakeholders, including the Cancer Society, Cancer Control New Zealand, Health Sponsorship Council, Melanoma Foundation of New Zealand, the New Zealand Dermatological Society and other members of the New Zealand Skin Cancer Steering Committee, will attend the forum where it is expected a complaint made by the Cancer Society and Consumer NZ to the Commerce Commission, highlighting the practices of various sunbed operators, will be discussed.

Since 2005 Consumer NZ has carried out four mystery-shopper surveys on sunbed operations. The latest investigation shows a disappointing level of improvement in practices and at the extreme level, blatant misinformation provided by some operators.

Only seven out of 69 operators met the requirements of the Australia/New Zealand standard which states that "claims of non-cosmetic health benefits shall not be made in the promotion of tanning unit use. And there shall be no claim that solaria use is safe from risk".

Several companies made claims at their premises, or on their website, that the Cancer Society and Consumer NZ believe to be misleading and contravene the Fair Trading Act. "Unfortunately New Zealand has a *voluntary* standard for sunbed operators," said the Society's Skin Cancer Advisor Dr Judith Galtry, "but we have a few teeth under the Fair Trading Act. The lack of compliance with voluntary standard highlights the need for legislation governing the operation of sunbeds in New Zealand."

Some sunbed operators claim that sunbeds boost vitamin D and that vitamin D prevents cancer, diabetes, heart disease, osteoporosis and multiple sclerosis. However, international research shows that while vitamin D is important for healthy bones, the evidence to support its effectiveness in protecting against other health conditions is not as clear. Some operators also claim sunbeds are a great way to get a controlled and consistent dose of vitamin D compared with the sun, which varies depending on the time of year and day.

There is no evidence to show that sunbed use offers any health benefits. In reality, sunbeds emit UVR which is a major cause of skin cancer, and may also lead to the development of cataracts and other eye conditions, premature skin ageing and immune suppression. In addition, the UVR emitted by sunbeds is

not the same as natural sunlight, and this artificiality is likely to be dangerous according to NIWA research.”

In 2009 the International Agency for Research on Cancer - which is part of the World Health Organization (WHO) - called on all governments to regulate sunbed use. They say even one sunbed session before the age of 35 increases the melanoma risk by 75 percent and reclassified sunbeds as a ‘group 1’ carcinogen (the same category as cigarettes).

“Another of the more ridiculous claims is that people should be wary of sunscreen. Skin can burn in less than 15 minutes and sunscreen is an important part of the Slip, Slop, Slap and Wrap message. If applied correctly sunscreen can provide protection against UV radiation and recent evidence shows it has the potential to reduce the risk of melanoma.

We know that young people, especially young women, use sunbeds and that harmful exposure in adolescence increases the risk of melanoma in later life. Melanoma was the third most common cancer for women under 25 in 2007, the year for which the latest melanoma statistics are available.

The Cancer Society and Consumer NZ want the public to have the ‘real facts’ about sunbeds as opposed to those driven by commercial interest.

To arrange an interview with Dr Galtry or Craig Sinclair please contact:

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