To submit a letter in response to a JRSM article, please visit: http://rsmjournals.com to find the article concerned, then click on the ‘send a quick comment’ link found in the article information section. Quick comments will automatically be considered for publication in print.

Skin cancer: prevention is better than cure

I agree with Dr Rees1 that skin cancer is an important health issue due to its raising incidence. Although the article focuses on the management of skin cancer by surgery, there are preventive programmes and treatments to reduce the risk of developing skin cancer. These include well publicized annual sun exposure reduction programs, such as the Sun Smart campaign by Cancer Research UK and SunAwareness by the British Association of Dermatologists. NICE has published public health guidance on skin cancer prevention.2 There is also the Sunbeds (Regulation) Act that came into force in 2011 in England and Wales that stops under-18s from using sunbeds and now recently forible in Northern Ireland.

It is well recognized that the rising burden on managing skin cancer is related to an ageing population but there are iatrogenic causes: patients who require immunosuppressants, such as organ transplant recipients, and those with severe inflammatory dermatosis, for example psoriasis. The use of a type of phototherapy, PUVA, was cautioned in recently published NICE psoriasis guidelines in those with fairer skin types due to the long-term risk of skin cancer, worsened when systemic treatments are subsequently used.3 These patients should more vigilant to undertake sun protection measures. Furthermore, attempts to reverse skin field cancerization have also been employed, which includes the use of creams (e.g. 5-fluorouracil, imiquimod) and photodynamic therapy. Chemoprophylaxis with acitretin, a systemic retinoid, has also shown to be effective in reducing the skin cancer burden.4

As they say, ‘prevention is better than cure’, which is also an aim supported by the Institute for Innovation and Improvement.

Seau Cheung
Consultant Dermatologist, Corbett Hospital, Stourbridge, DY8 4JB, UK
Email: stc@doctors.org.uk

Competing interests
None declared

References

DOI: 10.1177/014076813477588

Doctors’ age at domestic partnership and parenthood: cohort studies

I read with interest the paper by Goldacre et al.1

As a female surgeon, the finding in Table 5 that 74% of general practitioners had children by the age of 35 compared with 41% in female surgeons was particularly striking. The authors also concluded that women were rejecting certain specialties on their perception that they were incompatible with having a family, with many more in the female GPs group (n = 2267) than the female surgeon group (n = 313).

It should be noted that these cohort studies are from an era when surgical training was exceptionally intense with trainee-led operating at all hours considered normal, whereas surgical training is more similar to other specialties in intensity now.

It would be unfortunate if female medical graduates were deterred from entering surgical specialties because of a perception that surgical careers are not suited to family life. I would agree with the authors that further work is needed to determine whether doctors decide not to have children because of their career.

Women in Surgery at the Royal College of Surgeons (England) consider that female doctors interested in pursuing a surgical career should not think that the roles of female surgeon and mother are incompatible. I am a Consultant Orthopaedic surgeon, mother to three children, and wife to a Hospital Consultant. The Women in Surgery Group at the Royal College of Surgeons (England) has produced a ‘Pregnancy and Maternity’ leaflet which is available at http://surgicalcareers.rcseng.ac.uk/documents/Pregnancy.pdf

Jacqueline Waterman
Consultant Trauma and Orthopaedic Surgeon, Deputy Chair Women in Surgery
Email: jacqueline.waterman@thh.nhs.uk

Competing interests
JW is Deputy Chair Women in Surgery, Royal College of Surgeons (England).

Reference

DOI: 10.1177/014076813477589