

Assessing Queen's University Belfast (QUB) medical students' perception of the importance of giving sun care advice to patients

Thompho Gwen Ditedu ¹ Professor Anna Gavin ²

1. Year 5 medical student; 2. Clinical Professor, School of Medicine, Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences



OBJECTIVES:

- To carry out a survey of medical students in years 1-5 to ascertain how important they think it is to give sun care advice to patients in general, but specifically to those patients who exhibit higher risk-taking behaviours, such as those using sun beds.
- To look at students' perceived importance of physician provided sun-care advice based on their own individual sun care habits.

METHODS:

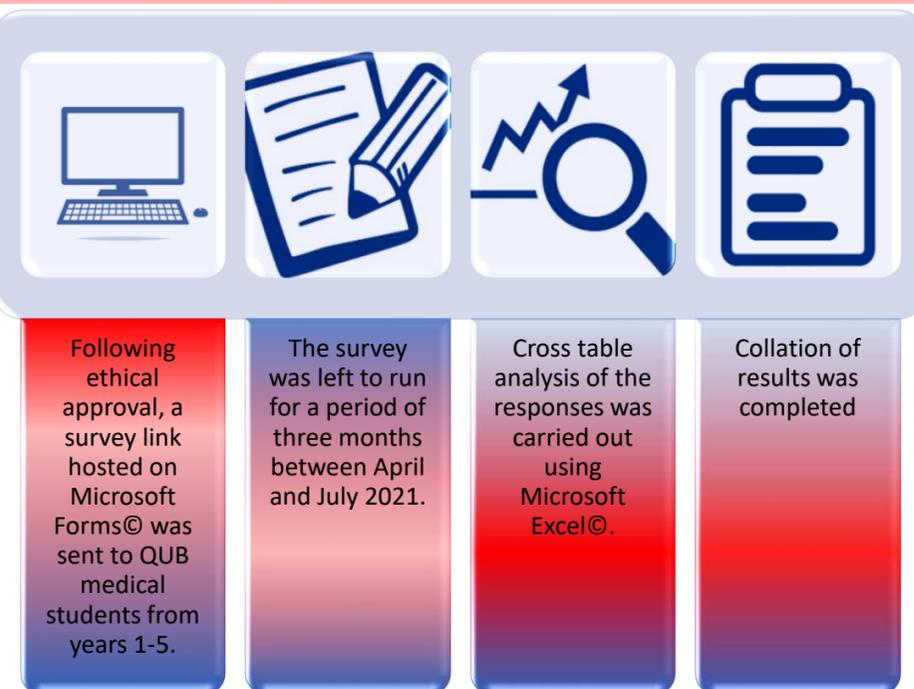


Figure 1

RESULTS:

A total of 50 responses were recorded. 66% of responses were from students aged between 21-24. This was also the median age and the most common age group in this cohort. Most responses came from those in fourth year of medicine and the majority (74%) identified as white.

Participant ethnicity

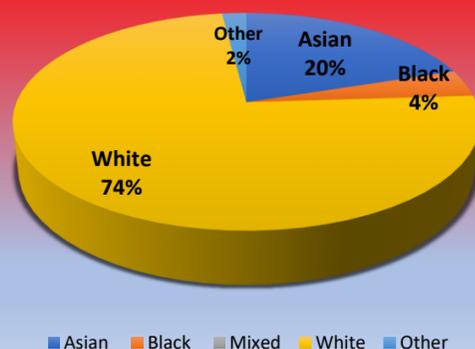


Figure 2

- 88%** of respondents have experienced sunburn. 81.8% of these identified as white, 15.9% as Asian and none identified as Black, while 2.3% identified as 'Other'(Table 1).
- Furthermore, **68%** of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that *"It is important for doctors to give sun care advice to all patients they see"*(Table 2). Additionally, **94%** of them strongly agreed that "It is important for doctors to give sun care advice to patients who exhibit high risk-taking behaviours such as using sun beds."
- Of the sun protection behaviours we tested, we found no relationship between frequency of wearing a hat/skin covering clothes when out in the sun and agreeing with the importance of doctors giving sun protection advice. However,
 - We did find that respondents who spent more time in the sun were more likely to agree that patients exhibiting higher risk behaviours needed sun protection advice from their doctor (**100% vs 92.8%**).
 - We also found that those who spent the least time abroad on a summer holiday, were more likely to agree with this statement than those who spent more time abroad (**100% vs 66.6%**).
 - Those who had the best sunscreen wearing practices (Table 3) were more in agreement that, "It is important for doctors to give sun care advice to all patients they see", compared to those who reported wearing sunscreen less often (**71% vs 57%**).
- Most respondents (**74%**) reported never having received advise form a doctor about sun protection measures.

What is your ethnicity? (% of each in the sample)	Asian (20%)	Black (4%)	Other (2%)	White (74%)	Total
Have you ever been sunburned?					
I do not know	1	0	0	0	1
No	2	2	0	1	5
Yes	7	0	1	36	44
Grand total	10	2	1	37	50

Table 1

"It is important for doctors to give sun care advice to all patients they see."	No. of responses	Percentage
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Disagree	5	10%
Neutral	11	22%
Agree	19	38%
Strongly Agree	15	30%
Grand Total	50	

Table 2

"It is important for doctors to give sun care advice to all patients they see."	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
How often do you wear sunscreen?						
Always	9	8	3	0	0	20
Often	3	5	5	2	0	15
Sometimes	1	4	1	2	0	8
Rarely	1	2	2	1	0	6
Never	1	0	0	0	0	1
Grand total	15	19	11	5	0	50

Table 3

DISCUSSION:

This survey highlighted a few significant findings. Firstly, it showed that medical students like the most of the general population in Northern Ireland (NI), experienced sunburn (1), despite an expected greater knowledge of sun protective behaviours. Most respondents who reported being sunburned identified as white, as would be anticipated, due to fair skin.

It was surprising that the majority of respondents had never themselves, been given sun-protection advice, and therefore illustrated a greater need on the part of doctors, to increase the frequency of sun protection counselling.

Importantly, only 68% of respondents thought counselling was important for all patients compared to 94% who thought that specifically those with high risk behaviours such as using sunbeds, should be counselled on sun protection. This is interesting as the majority of the population in NI is Fitzpatrick scale I or II (2) skin type, at high risk of sun damage and thus would benefit from better sun protection advice regardless.

Additionally, wearing sunscreen, spending less time outdoors and on a summer holiday abroad, was associated with higher perceived importance of sun protection counselling. This is consistent with literature that suggests that physicians' own behaviour and habits, influence the frequency at which they counsel their patients on it (3).

CONCLUSION:

We hypothesized those medical students who are most engaged with sun-care habits themselves would be more likely to perceive giving sun-care advice to patients as more important than those who were not. This was the case for some but not all sun protective behaviours. For example, this was true for time spent outdoors; time spent abroad on holiday and wearing sunscreen. However, this did not apply to wearing sun protective clothing. There is also a greater need for physician counselling on sun protection to encourage greater uptake.

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