



Breast Cancer
Expert and Survivor,
Kimberly Allison, MD

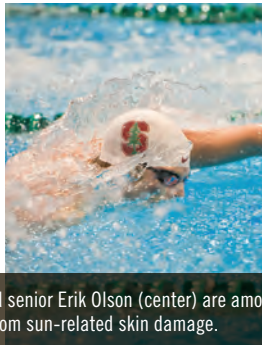
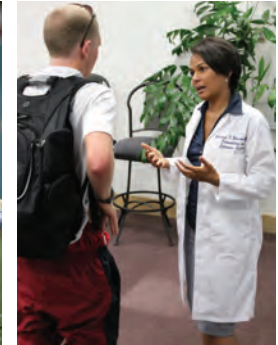
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Stanford Cancer Institute News

A PUBLICATION FOR PATIENTS AND FRIENDS OF THE STANFORD CANCER INSTITUTE



Stanford Cancer Institute and senior Erik Olson (center) are among the partners in SUNSPORT, an exciting new program to protect student-athletes from sun-related skin damage.

SUMMER 2013

Teaming Up to Prevent Skin Cancer

Collaborative Program Educates Stanford Athletes About Sun Exposure Risks

Collegiate athletes are used to getting attention from coaches, fans and even opponents... but dermatologists? At Stanford they do.

Over the last year Stanford's outdoor athletic teams have received skin screening exams, educational talks and detailed questionnaires from dermatologists representing SUNSPORT, a new program to help protect student-athletes from sun-related skin damage.

SUNSPORT (Stanford University Network for Sun Protection, Organization, Research and Teamwork) is a partnership among the Stanford Cancer Institute, the Dermatology

and Athletics departments, and Stanford Hospital & Clinics to inform outdoor athletes about their risks and to improve their sun-safety behaviors.

Research shows that National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) athletes playing outdoor sports spend an average of four hours per day, ten months per year training and competing outside, often during times of peak sun intensity. What's more, perspiration increases skin sensitivity and the risk of sunburn and other sun-related skin damage.

Despite these facts—and that 96 percent of NCAA athletes say they believe that

sunscreen helps prevent skin cancer—over 50 percent report never using sunscreen, and 75 percent of those who use it do so just three or fewer days per week.

“The data show that outdoor athletes are at serious risk, especially later in life,” said SCI Director Beverly Mitchell, MD. “SUNSPORT provides education and skin protection strategies to reduce lifetime incidence of skin cancer among Stanford's athletes and community.”

Skin cancer is the most prevalent form of cancer, with over 3.5 million cases

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diagnosed in the U.S. each year. And melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer, is the second most common cancer among those aged 15 to 29.

The incidence of all types of skin cancer, including melanoma, is on the rise, particularly among girls and young women aged 15 to 39. Some of this increase is thought to be due to the proliferation of indoor tanning bed use, and SUNSPORT has anecdotal reports of some female athletes using tanning beds to even out their sports-related tan lines.

The risk for male athletes is also underappreciated. A recent study led by SCI member **Susan Swetter, MD**, showed that while the incidence rate is higher among young white women, young men are 55 percent more likely to die of melanoma than their female counterparts.

“Our findings suggest there may be biological differences between men and women that contribute to the worse survival from melanoma observed in young men,” said Swetter, director of the Stanford Pigmented Lesion and Melanoma Program and a founder of SUNSPORT. “Our study

further underscores the importance of SUNSPORT’s mission and message.”

Killer Tan

Stanford scholar-athlete Erik Olson was proud of his tan. Actually, not so much the tan itself, but what it represented. Olson is a distance specialist on the Stanford Track & Field team, and in the running fraternity a deep tan is a sign of one’s commitment to training. His tan was “earned” logging countless miles in the California sun.

“I ran without my shirt on pretty much every day for five or six years,” said Olson. “The sun beat on my back with no sunscreen, and it took its toll.”

In August of 2012 Olson was diagnosed with melanoma above his right shoulder blade. He was just 20 years old. Fortunately, his cancer was caught early and a relatively minor surgery removed the lesion. The surgeon also removed lymph nodes from under Olson’s arm to determine if the melanoma had spread. The laboratory analysis took a few days.

“It seemed like an eternity,” said Olson.

The call came early in the morning, waking him up. “It’s a negative result,” said the doctor.

Olson paused, still hazy with sleep. “Negative is good, right?”

“Yes, negative is *very* good.”

Teaching From Experience

Fully recovered and cancer-free, Olson began his Junior year with some new habits. He maintained his busy schedule of studying human biology and running track, but he now wore sunscreen every day, always ran in a shirt and saw his dermatologist regularly.

“I feel kind of lucky, in the sense that I am more aware of what the sun can do,” said Olson. “Now I am trying to do as much as I can to prevent sun exposure.”

And not just for himself. Olson hopes that other young people will learn from his experience, so he joined the SUNSPORT team as a Student-Athlete Adviser, serving as a role model of proper skin protection and helping SUNSPORT create messages and activities that are appealing and relevant to his peers.

Joining Olson on the advisory board is his Track & Field teammate, and girlfriend, Jessica Tonn. A fellow distance runner, it was Tonn who spied the unusual looking mole on Olson’s back and urged him to get it checked.

“We had just finished a run and I noticed a strange-looking bump,” said Tonn. “Thankfully, Erik is fine, but it was a scary situation. Through SUNSPORT we hope to help prevent others from having similar, or worse, experiences.”

In addition to student-athletes, SUNSPORT is also recruiting student volunteers, local community leaders and Stanford alumni to help support and expand the program. Plans include increased use of social media and creating a presence at select Stanford



A temporary SUNSPORT tattoo next to Erik Olson’s surgical scar.



SUNSPORT educates and protects athletes and fans of all ages.

sporting events. SUNSPORT booths will provide free information, sunscreen and other items to fans and the general public.

“The popularity of Stanford Athletics creates a great opportunity to promote sun safety to the community,” said SUNSPORT dermatologist Swetter. “Outdoor athletes are at increased risk, but we all need to be sun smart.”

This year SUNSPORT piloted some outreach efforts with the Men’s and Women’s Golf teams. For example, free sunscreen and sun exposure information pamphlets were provided for players from the 17 teams participating in the 2013 U.S. Intercollegiate Golf Tournament hosted at Stanford.

“Golfers spend a great deal of time in the sun,” said Conrad Ray, The Knowles Family Director of Men’s Golf. “SUNSPORT helps develop good habits in golfers and sports fans of all ages, and is a valuable service in people’s overall health.”

Over the summer, SUNSPORT dermatologists gave presentations to children attending several Stanford youth golf camps as well as local swim team members to assess their sun exposure knowledge and practices, and to provide education. Developing good sun protection habits at an early age is another SUNSPORT goal, and more youth-related activities are planned for the coming year.

Team Effort

Stanford’s first-in-the-nation skin protection program was the brainchild of a group of young dermatologists who had been collegiate athletes themselves. They experienced the long, sun-drenched practice sessions and the relative indifference to skin protection, and now it is their job to treat the consequences.

“As athletes we were told to stay hydrated on hot days, but got no guidance about how to protect our skin,” said Justin Gordon, MD, co-chief resident in dermatology, former collegiate baseball player and a SUNSPORT founder. “As a dermatologist, I am now able to see the damaging effects of chronic sun exposure, such as premature aging and skin cancer.”

Gordon, Swetter and the other Stanford dermatologists shared their concept with members of the SCI leadership, who supported development of a program as part of the Institute’s overall cancer prevention effort. A series of joint meetings solidified program goals, methods and identity, and SUNSPORT was launched.

“Cancer prevention is integral to our mission, and skin cancer is the most preventable form of cancer,” said SCI Director Mitchell. “SUNSPORT takes a proactive approach to encouraging healthy skin protection habits.”

The next step was to approach the Athletic Department to enlist their cooperation, and to determine how best to integrate SUNSPORT’s educational and behavioral components without creating additional burdens on time-strapped coaches and players. The administrators welcomed the program and recommended working with the Athletic Training staff, whose members are responsible for athletes’ day-to-day health and safety.

Scott Anderson, Stanford’s Head Athletic Trainer, immediately embraced the program and recommended that Assistant Athletic Trainer Matt Harrelson join SUNSPORT’s leadership committee to provide critical input and coordination with the teams, coaches and other Athletic Trainers.

“SUNSPORT aims to keep our student-athletes healthy and to develop good life-long behaviors, which makes it a perfect fit for us,” said Anderson. “We’re also glad that we are able to assist with the research aspect of the program.”

SUNSPORT uses annual student athlete surveys to gather longitudinal data and assess how education and reinforcement of sun safety practices changes student-athletes’ behavior over the course of their Stanford career.

Here again, the Athletic Trainers perform a critical function by providing sunscreen and reminding athletes to use it for all practice sessions and competitions.



SUNSPORT team members (L to R) Michael Claeys, Michelle Longmire, MD, Brooks Behr, MD, Mina Ally, MBBS, and Justin Gordon, MD.

“We can provide the education, skin cancer screenings and treatment for student-athletes,” said dermatologist Gordon, “but it’s the coaches and Athletic Trainers who reinforce good sun protection habits every day.”

With their help, SUNSPORT is making a difference. More student-athletes are accessing dermatological care and more seem to be protecting their skin: this Spring, for the first time in memory, the Athletic Department ran out of sunscreen!

More information on SUNSPORT can be found at stanford.sunsport.edu or on Facebook at “Stanford Sunsport.” ■