**Sun Kissed to Death: A Ted Talk:**

Slip, slop, slap. Three words that are drilled into Australian children, and yet we still have “one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world” (SunSmart, n.d.). People know the importance of sunscreen, and yet we still have high cases of skin cancer. Clearly something isn’t working, therefore the primary school curriculum needs to be revamped to include enhanced education about the dangers of the sun, whilst also conditioning the students to accept their natural skin colour as beautiful. Every 30 minutes, an Australian is diagnosed with melanoma (Melanoma Institute Australia, 2022). In 30 minutes, a child could be inspired to apply sunscreen. Now is the time to act and inform our children of the dangers of the sun.

“Skin cancer accounts for the largest number of cancers diagnosed in Australia each year” but it is one of the most preventable cancers to exist (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2016). Although the numbers of people getting skin cancer has declined over the years, “two in three Australians will be diagnosed with a skin cancer in their lifetime”, with roughly “2000 people [losing] their lives to skin cancer each year” (Turning the tide of skin cancer, n.d.). I believe this can be credited to the lack of education about the dangers of the sun, combined with the belief that having a tan makes you look more attractive.

Now, I know what you may be thinking: many schools around Australia have adopted the SunSmart School campaign! But what exactly does that entail? According to the Cancer Council website, “the program is aimed towards minimising the amount of time school students (and teacher/staff) are directly exposed to potentially harmful solar ultraviolet radiation” (National SunSmart Schools Program, n.d.). Launched in 1998, the campaign provided education about being safe in the sun, however over time, its effectiveness has dramatically worn off, leaving behind empty promises. While the SunSmart company does have webpages titled ‘Advice for schools & early childhood’, it merely mentions how “UV exposure during childhood and adolescence has a big impact on future skin cancer risk”, (Schools & Early Childhood, n.d.). Despite the advertising and attempts to make schools’ SunSmart, assistance is desperately needed from the government to alter the primary curriculum to have a larger focus on the importance of being sun safe.

Conversely, in the secondary school’s page, users are suggested to apply for a free SunSmart membership. I’m not sure how many of you know teenagers, but most of them are likely to ignore what authority figures tell them, as an attempt at rebellion. In contrast, habits such as brushing your teeth are taught at a young age and seem like second nature. Surely then, primary schools should have a stronger curriculum with engaging and meaningful lessons about sun damage and sun protection to develop this same mindset. Additionally, “students are in school when daily UV radiation levels are at their peak, meaning schools are uniquely placed to educate about sun protection behaviour, ... and ultimately reduce a student’s lifetime risk of skin cancer” (Cancer Council, n.d.) Primary school students may be more receptive to accepting these ideas, as it is too late to wait until secondary school.

Additionally, in our society, many people are conditioned to believe that you need a tan to be beautiful and that having pale skin is unappealing. “Recent research shows Australians who feel particularly self-conscious about their body are more likely to intentionally tan to increase their sense of attractiveness” (Soyer & Lee, 2019). This desire to have a tan contributes towards the high rates of skin cancer as a common misconception is that tanning won’t give you skin cancer unless you get burnt. However, “skin cancer occurs when skin cells are damaged, from over exposure to UVR from the sun”, and tanning is over exposure to the sun (Healey, 2016). It seems this tan trend appeared in 1923 when “Coco Chanel went on a cruise … and returned with a sunburn. … Sun-kissed skin meant you were a woman of leisure” (Mcilhargey, 2021). This challenged the perception of tanned skin being a sign of low socio-economic status and redefined it to be a symbol for a glamorous woman who is rich enough to sunbathe and not have to work. This belief has continued throughout society and is still prevalent in the mindset of many Australians. While it is crucial to properly educate youth on the damage from the sun, we also need to start combatting society’s “unflinching allegiance to the idea that girls and women must be [tanned]”, by supporting the idea that all skin types are beautiful (Dying for a tan, 2014).

Seek shade, slide on some sunnies, sign up for SunSmart schools. Now more than ever, it is crucial for the government to develop better school curriculum about the dangers of the sun. Additionally, society needs to start accepting and acknowledging the beauty of all skin types. As “melanoma is the most common cancer in young Australians aged 15-39”, there has never been a better time to change the curriculum and prevent this from happening again (About Melanoma, 2019). So, next time you’re in the sun, slather it on.

**Bibliography:**

About Melanoma 2019, Mates against Melanoma, viewed 8 August 2022, <https://www.mam.org.au/about-melanoma/#:~:text=It%20is%20estimated%20that%202%2C500,also%20very%20high%20and%20increasing.>

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016, *Skin cancer in Australia*, Australian Government, viewed 4 August 2022, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/cancer/skin-cancer-in-australia/summary-1>

Cancer Council n.d., *SunSmart in schools and early childhood*, viewed 11 August 2022, <https://www.cancer.org.au/cancer-information/causes-and-prevention/sun-safety/be-sunsmart/sunsmart-in-schools>

*Dying for A Tan* 2014, More than a body, viewed 8 August 2022, <https://www.morethanabody.org/ugly-side-of-tanning/>

Healey, J (ed.), 2016, *Cancer prevention*, The Spinney Press, Wollongong, NSW, viewed 8 August 2022, <https://radfordcollege.softlinkhosting.com.au/oliver/home/resources/details/e80e345bac10b51d3c1bc476002a5e30>

Schools & early childhood n.d., SunSmart, viewed 4 August 2022, <https://www.sunsmart.com.au/advice-for/schools-early-childhood>

Melanoma Institute Australia 2022, *Melanoma Facts*, viewed 31 July 2022, <https://melanoma.org.au/about-melanoma/melanoma-facts/>

Mcilhargey, M 2021, *Why Is Tan Skin Associated With Beauty? We Investigate*, PopSugar, viewed 15 August 2022, <https://www.popsugar.com.au/beauty/tan-skin-american-beauty-standards-48410548>

National SunSmart Schools Program n.d., Cancer Council, viewed 4 August 2022, <https://actcancer.org/prevention/sunsmart/act-schools-and-early-childhood-services/national-schools-program/#:~:text=What's%20in%20a%20SunSmart%20status,including%20research%20in%20this%20area.>

Preston, P, Sinclair, C, Olsen, C & Cust, A 2022, *Skin cancer – time for national leadership to meet critical challenges ahead*, Public Health Research and Practise, viewed 6 August 2022, <https://www.phrp.com.au/issues/march-2022-volume-32-issue-1/skin-cancer-time-for-national-leadership-to-meet-critical-challenges-ahead/#refList2>

Soyer, H & Lee, K 2019, *No such thing as a safe tan: What’s underneath that summer glow?*, Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, viewed 6 August 2022, <https://www1.racgp.org.au/newsgp/clinical/there-is-no-such-thing-as-a-safe-tan-what%E2%80%99s-happen>

SunSmart n.d., *Skin cancer facts & stats*, viewed 31 July 2022, <https://www.sunsmart.com.au/skin-cancer/skin-cancer-facts-stats#:~:text=Two%20in%20three%20Australians%20will,by%20the%20age%20of%2070.&text=About%202%2C000%20Australians%20die%20from%20skin%20cancer%20each%20year.&text=Australia%20has%20one%20of%20the,skin%20cancer%20in%20the%20world.>

Turning the tide of skin cancer n.d., Cancer Council, viewed 4 August 2022, <https://www.cancer.org.au/about-us/how-we-help/prevention/stories/turning-the-tide-of-skin-cancer>

UV Radiation and You 2016, Cancer Council, viewed 17 August 2022, <https://actcancer.org/information/information-sheets/uv-radiation-and-you/>