

Health, Wellbeing and Local Government Committee

HWLG(3)-22-09 Paper 11

A response from the National Public Health Service to the inquiry into the use and regulation of sun beds in Wales.

Background

The National Public Health Service (NPHS) delivers a full range of public health services, which aim to improve health and wellbeing, reduce health inequalities; protect against disease and health threats and contribute to improvement in health and social care services.

The NPHS provides specialist evidence based public health advice, resources and information to enable a range of organisations, including the Welsh Assembly Government and Local Authorities to discharge their statutory public health functions.

Ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun and artificial sources such as sunbeds is of considerable public health concern and there is increasing scientific evidence relating to cumulative UV radiation exposure and the potential it has to cause damage to the skin, such as sunburn, skin cancer and ocular problems

The NPHS has a clear interest in responding to this particular Committee inquiry. In so doing we would emphasise to the committee the importance of seeking to address all aspects of exposure to UV radiation. The descriptive epidemiology highlights that there is clearly an increasing trend which requires further investigation and preventive action.

In relation to addressing the issue of prevention of malignant melanoma and other health related conditions related to exposure to the sun and UV radiation, the NPHS works, (as part of its currently agreed workplan with WAG) in partnership to support existing prevention campaigns, including the SunSmart campaign.

In assessing health need the NPHS currently works closely with colleagues in the Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit (WCISU).

Health Need

The number of people diagnosed with skin cancer (melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancer) has increased significantly in the United Kingdom (UK).

Information on malignant melanoma is available from WCISU. Information is available via several published reports

Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit. Cancer in Wales, 1992-2006: A comprehensive report September 2008

<http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sites3/Documents/242/WCISUTriennialReport2008%5FEnglish.pdf>

Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit. Annual Publication No. SA9/01 Cancer Incidence in Wales 2003-2007. January 23 2009

<http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sites3/Documents/242/Cancer%20Incidence%20in%20Wales%202003%2D2007.pdf>

The first report published by the Unit last Autumn revealed (p 121 - 133) that the incidence of malignant melanoma of the skin has significantly risen in both males and females in Wales. This data was collected over a fifteen year period from 1992-2006.

During 2007 in Wales, 558 cases of malignant melanoma were recorded and 113 deaths were recorded.

Malignant melanoma is now the most common cancer in young adults (aged 15-34 years).

WCISU have also published trend information which highlights the increase - "Trends in Incidence, 1985-2006" - (see extracts attached).

<http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sites3/Documents/242/melanoma1.xls>

Identifying existing evidence and ongoing research

The NPHS recommends that in considering the various issues, the committee should have regard to the current available evidence base. The NPHS has not had the opportunity during the short period of the call for evidence to undertake a full systematic review of the evidence. A systematic review generally takes between 18-24 months to undertake but allows for all the available evidence and research to be identified, appraised for its validity and considered.

The NPHS has however, included as evidence, a link to a 'rapid review' of literature, which has been undertaken for a Local Authority in a short timescale. The draft rapid review report is attached and contains information which may be of interest to the committee.

The rapid review has highlighted a number of recent comprehensive publications containing recommendations which we would draw to the attention of the committee. These publications include:

Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE). 13TH Report. The health effects and risks arising from exposure to ultraviolet radiation from artificial tanning devices. COMARE 2009. Available at: <http://www.comare.org.uk/documents/COMARE13thReport.pdf>.

IARC Working Group (2007). The association of use of sunbeds with cutaneous malignant melanoma and other skin cancers: a systematic review. "Int J Cancer "2007;120 :1116-1122.

Scientific Committee on Consumer Products of the European Commission. Opinion on biological effects of ultraviolet radiation relevant to health with particular reference to sunbeds for cosmetic purposes. SCCP/0949/05. SSCP 2008. Available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_risk/committees/04_sccp/docs/sccp_o_031b.pdf

These reports draw upon papers published up to 2008. In addition the NPHS would recommend that the committee commissions a further review of evidence over the period 2008/2009. The NPHS would be happy to provide advice and support in undertaking such an exercise.

Key findings from the current literature include:

The number of people diagnosed with skin cancer (melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancer) has increased significantly in the United Kingdom (UK).

Malignant melanoma is now the most common cancer in young adults (aged 15-34 years).

There is good evidence that sun exposure is the main cause of skin cancer.

Other factors that significantly influence the risk of skin cancer are the presence of fair skin, light coloured eyes, freckles or large moles.

There is evidence from observational studies that the use of sunbeds, particularly by young people increases the risk of skin cancer. There was survey evidence that young people are gaining access to sunbeds in Wales and that the level of supervision and information is poor.

Excess exposure to sun causes adverse effects other than skin cancer, such as ocular melanoma, photoageing and immunosuppression. Further good quality evidence is however required.

The perceived benefits of sunbed use are largely psychological and cosmetic in nature. The maintenance of Vitamin D levels by sunbed use is not recommended.

There have been reports of serious adverse effects of sunbeds, in particular from unsupervised outlets.

In undertaking the rapid review of evidence, colleagues also attempted (through a review of published literature and web based searches) to identify other information relevant to the inquiry including identification of sunbed establishments in Wales. The following information was obtained:

Determining the number of tanning/sunbed establishments in Wales proved difficult. In one survey, Wales had the highest registration rate with The Sunbed Association in the UK, with 17% of the 203 salons located in Wales registered. The outlet rates increased with increasing deprivation for urban areas and increasing affluence for rural areas.

There was no information on the number of people employed in tanning salons in Wales and therefore the impact of reducing sunbed use on employment could not be quantified.

Of the 22 local authorities in Wales 3 currently operate sun beds.

There is no current requirement that private sector UV sun tanning facilities be registered or licensed by local authorities, therefore local authorities have no formal mechanism for regulating how these facilities are offered.

Ongoing research

WCISU are currently carrying out a study of melanoma epidemiology. The main focus is on 5 year survival and the reasons underlying apparent poor outcome in Wales including for example the deprivation gradient in survival.

Recommendations

The NPHS recommends:

1. In addressing the specific terms of this inquiry, the committee emphasise the importance of seeking to address all aspects of exposure to ultraviolet radiation.
2. The committee have regard to the information and recommendations contained in several recently published reviews of the literature.
3. The committee note the gap in available published evidence and recommend a further review of literature be undertaken to address identified gaps in the current evidence, notably publications in 2008/09.

4. The Committee note the summary of key findings from a rapid review of literature undertaken by NPHS to support one LHB area.
5. The Committee note and support the ongoing study work being undertaken by WCISU to examine the epidemiology of melanoma.