

Guest Editorial

Families Play Safe in the Sun

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Educate, empower and encourage—these are the goals of Families Play Safe in the Sun (www.playsafeinthesun.org), the Women's Dermatologic Society's (WDS's) exciting new community outreach program funded by a generous community service grant of \$1 million from the 3M Foundation. The campaign is designed to promote sun safety and to provide skin health awareness and education to families with young children.

The founding mission of WDS, which has grown to more than 1200 members, is to support the professional development of women dermatologists. Mentoring programs for dermatologists in practice, residents in training and medical students have been important developments over the 33 years that WDS has existed. Similar to personal growth, WDS has matured. The addition of a service component extends its vision.

Based on the success of the Play Safe in the Sun campaign (developed in 2004) in which WDS members conducted skin cancer screenings at the Ladies Professional Golf Association tournaments, a grant application was submitted to the 3M Foundation for the development of a program that would reach out to WDS members' communities to help prevent skin cancer and promote sun safety to the general public, especially families with young children. Families Play Safe in the Sun was initiated in Boston in June 2005. Members of WDS are messengers of sun safety information!

In each city, booth activities are conducted at venues attended by families with young children; community forums at which civic leaders in health, education and recreation meet with local WDS members to discuss ways to promote sun

safety in their community; and skin cancer screenings are conducted by local WDS volunteers. All activities occur over a 2- to 3-day period. Adoption of a school or group by a WDS member is an evolving aspect of the program that is important to reinforce the many exciting ideas generated during the 3-day community program. A networking event held 6 to 8 weeks before the program serves as a rally for local WDS members to learn about the details of the program, sign up for activities they would like to support and also to alert WDS to special contacts in the community who might expand or promote the campaign.

The community booths are filled with information and activities (eg, free educational brochures, sunscreen samples, a coloring contest for children to show what sun safety means to them, a sun safety quiz, assessment of photodamage with a UV camera and Dermascan unit). Balloons, bracelets that change color with light exposure and stickers are playful tools used to promote skin health education. The US Environmental Protection Agency's award-winning educational program SunWise (www.epa.gov/sunwise) for children in kindergarten through grade 8 is displayed at Families Play Safe in the Sun events, and parents or teachers are encouraged to sign up to receive a free kit for the classroom.

What are the results? In the first 3 cities visited, 76 enthusiastic volunteers donated more than 350 hours, 590 skin cancer screenings were conducted, 1256 individuals underwent Dermascan assessments of sun damage, and more than 900 UV reflectance photographs were taken. Furthermore, 235 children submitted drawings of sun-safe families, 66 schools or classrooms signed up to receive the SunWise kit, and thousands of sunscreen samples were distributed along with brochures on skin cancer and sun-safety resources available at little

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or no charge. Mayoral declarations on the importance of sun safety were made in 2 cities. Ten radio and television interviews presented exciting opportunities for WDS members to make an even greater public impact. But these are merely numbers.

One of the greatest accomplishments of this campaign has been the *synergy* of new professional contacts among dermatologists, residents, medical students and nurses. The Dermatology Nurses' Association provided a number of enthusiastic volunteers, and one of its members presently serves as a liaison on WDS's service committee. WDS recently was invited to become a member of the National Council on Skin Cancer Prevention. To be *ambassadors* for not only our specialty but also medicine in general has had an immense impact on our volunteers as well as the public. What a *joy* it is to interact with and educate the public.

Collegiality, collaboration and cooperation fuel this unique campaign. Consider joining WDS (www.womensderm.org) and learn how you can participate in this dynamic endeavor.