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Building Blocks to Fun in the Sun

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Abstract: Building Blocks to Fun in the Sun is an educational applied research project that was implemented in Ohio. This article shares the process of the research, findings, and results that were implemented. The research could be duplicated in other geographic areas. The findings should enhance the educational endeavors of Extension educators.

Research of Topic

We conducted a review of research articles and discovered that "on an average day in the United States, more than 1 million people tan in tanning salons" (Whitmore, Morison, Potten, & Chadwick, 2001). "The risk of melanoma, the most deadly form of skin cancer, increases by 75 percent when use of tanning beds and sunlamps begins before 30 years of age" (American Academy of Dermatology, 2009). "Nearly 70 percent of tanning salon patrons are Caucasian girls and women primarily ages 16 to 29 years" (Swerdlow & Weinstock, 1998). However, little applied research has been conducted to gather what educational methods may be effective to adopting change in youth and adults.

"While knowledge and education are important parts of effective message and program design, other factors that affect health decisions should also be considered" (Gordon, 2002). This knowledge assisted us in development of our materials, realizing adults and youth experience peer pressure when deciding on sun safety issues. "Ball caps may be the headwear of choice because so many of the agricultural suppliers provide complimentary ball hats to those using their products. There may also be some peer pressure to choose the same headwear as friends and neighbors because ball caps are the style." (Burwell, 2004).

Reviewing specific research on gender and age, the research indicated that "Among all teens, younger teens (age 12-14) tend to be more vigilant about protecting themselves from the sun than older teens (ages 15-17)" (American Academy of Dermatology, 2005). With further research it was discovered "When sun protective behaviors were

explored by gender, the survey highlighted distinct differences between teen boys and girls. In general, teen girls are more careful about protecting themselves from the sun than teen boys â 59 percent of girls say they are very or somewhat careful vs. only 36 percent of boys." (American Academy of Dermatology, 2005) "But while parents and grandparents are busy slathering kids with sunscreen and arming them with hats and protective clothing, they are not as likely to practice this same behavior when it comes to protecting themselves." (American Academy of Dermatology, 2005)

The research objectives established included:

1. Conduct focus groups to gather current information on tanning.
2. Design, develop and evaluate educational materials using research and information gathered.

Methodology

After the review of the research, we designed questions to ask of both youth and adult focus groups. Six total focus groups were conducted asking the following questions:

- How much time do you spend in the sun?
- Do you use a tanning bed?
- Do you sun burn easily?
- Do you know the dangers of tanning?
- Do you use any protection in the sun?
- Do you see skin cancer as problem?
- How do we change people's behaviors?

After the data was analyzed from the focus groups, we discovered more education was needed to increase behavioral change for their communities and the state.

Results

The information gathered from the focus groups was analyzed. Some of the findings are as following:

- Teens and adults spend a lot of time in the sun.

- Adults were more likely to use sunscreen.
- Adults were more aware of skin cancer dangers although most youth thought wrinkles were a possibility.
- Many youth were not aware that tanning beds had similar dangers.
- Many of the participants' skin burned easily and thought getting a tan in a tanning bed was a healthy way of preventing skin damage.
- Many ideas were gathered from the focus group participants on how to get the correct information out to the public.

Some of the ideas would require companies to change their formulas, and other suggestions were simple implementation techniques to use in the community. One of the suggestions was for the pools to announce at the change of the lifeguards to apply more sunscreen.

From the findings of the research, a statewide team of Educators was formed to address the issues of educating Ohioans in the area of sun safety and prevention of skin cancer. Many of the Ohio State University Extension fact sheets on sun safety were revised and updated with current information using the research findings. A resource list was developed for the use of Extension educators to assist them with their basic knowledge and finding information to respond to questions. The Skin Cancer Survivor Game was developed to provide educators with additional fun teaching methods to enhance the learning of both youth and adults in the sun safety area. The game and additional information is available by contacting the authors. A sun safety kit was assembled along with a CD that included all of the materials for Educators to use with future programming.

To provide Extension educators with curriculum they could use in teaching, we evaluated current resources to identify the curriculum that best met the needs of Ohio citizens. The curriculum that was recommended to Extension educators was the R.A.Y.S.â Raising Awareness about Your Skin (Montgomery County, Ohio Medical Society Alliance, 2003). It was established that this curriculum would be beneficial for both youth and adult audiences. The data was also utilized to develop a statewide in-service for Extension Educators and other interested professionals in Ohio.

Assessing the needs of your community by using the focus group questions will enable you to design a program for your local needs. The Ohio State University Extension materials are available upon request.

Conclusion

We continue to complete research in the area of sun safety. We continue to implement the research in our communities. We share research in order to educate youth and adults in the area of sun safety and skin cancer prevention in various group settings. It is our hope that our efforts will have an impact on the reduction of skin cancer.

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