MELANOMA: THE BASICS

Melanoma is a cancer that begins in skin cells called melanocytes. These cells make melanin, which gives skin its color. Melanoma also protects the deeper layers of the skin from the sun’s harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays. Melanomas can develop anywhere on the body, but they typically occur on sun-exposed areas, such as the face, neck, and arms.

Melanomas are classified into four stages:

- **Stage I**: The cancer is localized, and lymph nodes are not involved.
- **Stage II**: The cancer has spread to lymph nodes near the site of the original tumor.
- **Stage III**: The cancer has spread to lymph nodes away from the site of the original tumor, or to other organs.
- **Stage IV**: The cancer has spread to distant organs, such as the brain, liver, or lungs.

The most common signs and symptoms of melanoma include:

- A new or changing mole.
- A mole that is asymmetrical.
- A mole that has irregular borders.
- A mole that is a different color.

The ABCDE Rule is helpful in remembering the characteristics of melanoma:

- **A**: Asymmetry: One half of the mole is not a mirror image of the other half.
- **B**: Border: Irregular, scalloped, or turned-in borders.
- **C**: Color: More than one color present.
- **D**: Diameter: Over 6 millimeters in greatest diameter.
- **E**: Evolution: Change over time. This change does not have to be sudden.

The earlier a melanoma is detected and treated, the better the outcomes. Early detection is key to improving survival rates. Routine skin self-examination and professional skin checks can help detect melanoma early.

The American Cancer Society recommends:

- Men and women aged 50 and older should have a skin check every 6 to 12 months.
- People with a history of melanoma or other skin cancers should have more frequent skin checks.
- People with a higher risk of melanoma (e.g., fair skin, red or blond hair, and blue or gray eyes) should have skin checks more often.

The risk of developing melanoma can be reduced by:

- Using sunscreen with a high sun protection factor (SPF) and avoiding midday sun.
- Wearing protective clothing such as long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Seeking shade and staying indoors during the hottest parts of the day.
- Avoiding tanning beds and sunlamps.

There are a variety of treatments for melanoma, including:

- Surgery: This is the most common treatment for melanoma, and it involves removing the cancerous tissue.
- Immunotherapy: This treatment uses the body's immune system to fight cancer.
- Chemotherapy: This treatment uses drugs to kill cancer cells.
- Targeted therapy: This treatment uses drugs that target specific abnormalities in the cancer cells.

It is important to follow up with your healthcare provider regularly after treatment to check for any signs of recurrence or new melanomas.

Melanoma can be prevented by protecting the skin from harmful UV rays. This includes:

- Using sunscreen with a high SPF and reapplying it every 2 hours.
- Seeking shade and covering up with hats and clothing.
- Avoiding tanning beds and sunlamps.
- Eating a healthy diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and lean protein.
- Staying at a healthy weight.

**References**

CANCER COMMITTEE CHAIR

Greg Fecteau, RN, MHA

The American College of Surgeon’s Commission on Cancer’s special recognition of Eastern Maine Medical Center (EMMC) as a Comprehensive Community Cancer Center (CCOC) is a testament to the dedication of the staff and volunteers who dedicate their time to improve the quality of patient care and outcomes. EMMC has been a leader in the region in providing comprehensive cancer care and services for the past year.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S REPORT

Paul Szal, MD

CancerCare of Maine continues to provide quality services to patients and families throughout the state. We have continued to expand our services and improve our care, and we are proud of the progress we have made.

CANCER COMMITTEE REPORT

Fuell, MD

Report on Cancer 2006

Bringing Hope to Life


Dr. Thomas Openshaw, MD

The Breast and Osteoporosis Center serves women in two locations, the Breast and Osteoporosis Center of Maine (BOCM) in Bangor, Maine, and the BOCM of Ellsworth. The center offers comprehensive care for women with breast and osteoporosis conditions. Our experienced medical team includes breast surgeons, radiologists, and endocrinologists, all working together to deliver the best possible care.

CANCER CASE CONFERENCE

Dr. Allen L’Italien, RN, MHA

The Cancer Case Conference is held at our Cancer Care Center in Bangor, Maine. The conference is designed to bring together the team of medical professionals who care for cancer patients. It provides an opportunity for the team to discuss the latest research and treatment options for patients, and to work together to provide the best possible care.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S REPORT

Greg Fecteau, RN, MHA

Eastern Maine Medical Center’s Cancer Program was honored with an Outstanding Achievement Award in February of 2006. The award recognizes the efforts of the entire team to improve the quality of patient care and outcomes. EMMC’s Cancer Program has continued to provide high-quality care and services to patients and families throughout the region.

New Technology

Dr. Allen L’Italien, RN, MHA

In Radiation Oncology, each treatment machine is now capable of fine-tuning dose delivery. Installation of the first MLC (multi-leaf collimator) on the third machine providing maximal flexibility for best treatment scheduling. IMRT (Intensity Modulated Radiation Therapy) for prostate cancer is now fully implemented. As our standards of practice change, we have added Sonarray, an ultrasound imaging technique, to more precisely localize the prostate gland.

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