

# A Dermatologist's Guide to Marketing Skin Cancer Screenings



As the mercury soars, bring prevention and professional skin checks out of the shadows and into the light.

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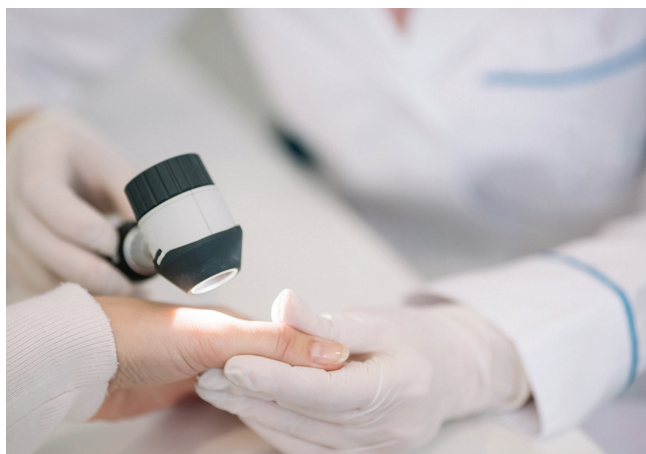
>> Readers may recall one of the largest National Cancer Institute (NCI)-backed skin cancer screening-oriented studies of its kind, spanning 5 years and including about 600,000 patients. Researchers found that individuals screened for cancer during this study period were more likely to be diagnosed with early in situ or stage 1 melanoma than those who did not undergo screenings.

Although these findings may be far from surprising for readers and researchers alike, study leaders were surprised by the extent to which screening increased the likelihood of such thin cancers being found; in the case of in situ melanomas, the difference between screened and non-screened study participants was more than two-fold. As the NCI put it, the findings underscore underlying expectations associated with screenings for any cancers, in that when one looks for something it tends to be found. And ideally, it is found very early into the disease process.

## 'TIS THE SUNNY SEASON TO MARKET PREVENTION

Of course, whenever the mercury rises, and the sun is more present, even those patients who tend to be stingy on the sunscreen may start to “slip, slop, slap” (as our Aussie friends summed up in their skin cancer prevention campaigns). However, there is no time like the present to market professional screening services as a vital part of patients' skin cancer prevention routines and, more generally, as part of a healthy skincare regimen.

We appreciate that there is an “art” to communicating services that may be associated with the “scary.” Additionally, there may be some apprehensiveness related to the nature of screenings and the idea of putting various parts of the body under the microscope. And while they



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may not be the sexiest or most dynamic services offered in the dermatology world, screenings can play a significant role in establishing or sustaining a healthy ongoing relationship with your patients.

Aside from the obvious health benefits, there are also opportunities within these routine visits to acquaint valued patients with other services. For instance, many conditions may be a nuisance that detracts from the patient's overall appearance. Everything from injections for “prejuvenation” to the latest lasers and light-based devices to attack cosmetic signs of aging could be introduced to aid in helping patients feel better about their appearance.

To get the most out of your efforts to attract loyal, quality patients, we encourage you to:

- **Mind your language.** We all know words matter. When it relates to checking for potentially daunting abnormalities like cancers, we encourage you to refrain from

terms that may be associated with pain, invasiveness, harm, danger, or threats. Ensure this approach is adhered to in all marketing collateral, from email blasts and website articles to social posts, YouTube videos, and audio/podcast spots.

- **Emphasize comfort.** Words like “safety,” “efficiency,” “protection,” “safeguard,” “health,” “professional,” and “early detection” all help to convey the ease of this means to the end and the benefits behind these screenings.
- **Showcase personal stories.** The “case” for screenings does not have to be made with substantive, large-scale study findings such as those mentioned above. Instead, showcase personal stories whenever possible. It is appropriate to showcase patient stories crafted by the AAD as part of the academy’s screening collateral. However, it is even more impactful and authentic to share case studies, whereby actual patients may express their relief and gratitude to getting checked and how years may have been added to their lives. Walk reluctant patients through some of these patients’ journeys. The ability to catch and intervene with cancers in their earliest stages really hits home with this approach in a way that impersonal stats cannot, no matter how telling the data may be.
- **Emphasize risk factors.** Ensure that those who are at heightened risk are: maintaining their screenings and getting those screenings at appropriate intervals. Look beyond the “usual suspects” (pale, red hair, light eyes) when reaching out to and educating patients on the risk factors and need for preventive care and services. Certain demographics tend to be diagnosed with serious cancers at later stages. So, it is a best practice to take special care to convey that they are still at risk and may even be more susceptible to certain forms of cancer.
- **Communicate and educate.** Be sure to parlay educational content on how cancer can manifest on certain skin types into regular, helpful, and meaningful posts on all the channels whereby your practice is present. Do not wait for skin cancer awareness or related cancer and dermatology months or weeks to arise. Communicate and educate consistently and often.
- **A picture says 1,000 words.** And truer words have never been spoken. Many of the spots and anomalies we are looking for lend themselves well to visuals. Think in terms of photographs and in terms of video. Since so many patients are likely visual learners, a single photo or video that differentiates a suspect spot from a benign one truly makes all the difference. Such imagery should also be integrated into materials that patients can take home with them.

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- **Empower patients.** It is vital to provide clear content on what patients and their spouses or partners should look for regarding changes to their skin in-between appointments.
- **Regularly scheduled appointments.** Do not let skin checks go on the back burner. Here, we can “borrow” from our healthcare friends in the dental world. Take a page from their book and solidify a tentative time for the next check before they leave the office immediately following their exam. That way, they are set for the next evaluation, be it 6 months down the road, 12 months onward, or even sooner (but generally no later). Patients can always call, text, or message back to solidify a better time at a later date and as the appointment draws nearer.
- **Reminders.** Likewise, it is a good practice for your office to send out reminders about scheduling if it is not done at the time of the appointment. Or, be sure to have a system in place to alert about the upcoming appointment if the visit was scheduled several months before. Reminders could be sent out a week or even a month in advance.

We understand the year-round importance of proper UV protection and professional preventive services. Yet, there is something to be said for stepping up your marketing game on this front when so many people are out there basking in the rays. Skin cancer checks and associated expertise should never stay in the shadows, and by shining a light on these valuable services, you can continue to demonstrate and instill trust and authority and attract new “brand advocates” to your practice. ■

*Naren Arulrajah, President and CEO of Ekwa Marketing, has been a leader in medical marketing for over a decade. Ekwa provides comprehensive marketing solutions for busy dermatologists, with a team of more than 180 full time professionals, providing web design, hosting, content creation, social media, reputation management, SEO, and more. If you're looking for ways to boost your marketing results, call 855-598-3320 for a free strategy session with Naren. You may also schedule a session at your convenience with the Senior Director of Marketing - Lila, by visiting <https://www.ekwa.com/msm/> or simply send a text to 313-777-8494.*