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Are General Physicians Prepared for Struggling Skin Cancer?—Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract The aim of this study is to evaluate the role of general practitioners (GP) in selecting higher risk population for skin cancer screening. GP's training was organized to examine a specific high risk population consisting mainly of fisherman and farmers in a city of North of Portugal. Health care professionals of local health units training was performed by two dermatologists 2 months before the screening. During 8 weeks GPs selected patients with skin cancer suspicious lesions and/or risk factors consecutively from their regular consultation. These selected patients were referred to a dermatologist evaluation. Six dermatologists using manual dermoscopy examined the previously selected patients. One hundred eight patients have been screened, 35 % of which were males and 65 % females, with a mean age of 54 years. Full skin evaluation by dermatologists revealed 31 % of actinic keratosis, 5 % of leucoplasia, 7 % of basal cell carcinoma, 8 % of squamous cell carcinoma, and 1 % of melanoma. Cohen's kappa coefficient between dermatologist and GPs was 0.18. Selective screening with collaboration of GPs allowed the detection of more cases of skin cancer than the nonselective screenings in the literature. Although the diagnostic agreement between GPs and dermatologists was not good, our results indicate that active collaboration of dermatologists with primary health care units for selective skin cancer screening, including post graduated courses on their own health units, can be a way of optimizing early detection of cutaneous pre malignant and malignant lesions.

Keywords Skin cancer · Screening · General physicians

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Introduction

Despite being among the most preventable types of cancer (avoiding ultra violet radiation exposure), skin cancer is more common than all other cancers combined and its incidence is increasing worldwide [1] Portuguese oncology register reports 6 to 8 cases of melanoma per 100,000 per year and ten times more cases for NMSC could be expected [1, 2]. Advanced melanoma is often lethal and nonmelanoma skin cancer (NMSC), although seldom lethal, if advanced can cause severe disfigurement and morbidity and might be a costly burden to society [3].

Public health campaigns have been conducted to disseminate information about sun potential damage and encourage practices and policies aiming to reduce skin cancer incidence and mortality [4, 5]. GPs are the first line of public health, seeing more frequently people at risk. They have a crucial role in the promotion of the population healthy behavior towards sun exposure, teaching the self-examination and referring to specialized units of dermatology.

The objective of this study was to access the effectiveness of selective screening (SS) of risk population by GPs.