

10th Asia-Pacific Dermatology Conference

November 28-29, 2016 Melbourne, Australia



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The burden of melanoma in the Western Cape province of South Africa: Provision of a platform for evidence-based research

Age standardized incidence rates of 15.88/100000 and 12.68/100000 for melanoma in South Africa have been reported nationally for Caucasian men and women respectively. The incidence rates in the Cape Town region of the Western Cape Province however are in excess of 60/100000. Cutaneous melanoma (CM) has the highest incidence in Caucasians, followed by the persons of mixed ancestry and a considerably lower incidence in both the Black and Asian population. Over the years, the rates of melanoma has been increasing and to further study this disease the African Cancer Institute (ACI) at Stellenbosch University has embarked on the establishment of a melanoma research platform that encompasses primary prevention, behavioral sciences, genomic research and public policy. Despite numerous treatment options becoming available, drug access remains a limiting step and melanoma prevention and control remain a core focus through the extensive network of partners within the public and private sector organizations. Research within the Division of Dermatology has commenced on the molecular biology of hand and foot melanoma, also known as acral melanoma (AM), which appears to be a clinically distinct variant of melanoma. This variant of melanoma represents the most common expression of melanoma in the Black population and has a 5-year survival rate of 80.3%, lower than for other forms of melanoma. This is thought to be a result of delays in diagnosis. Acral melanoma is also thought to have unique patterns of genetic mutation when compared to other forms of cutaneous melanoma. The current studies aim to identify molecular alterations that drive tumorigenesis in AM in Southern Africans. It is anticipated that this study will help classify high from low risk AMs followed by the development of a molecular predictive test and to characterize the clinical and histological features of AM in our population. By harnessing the collaborative intellect of individuals, groups and institutions throughout the region and abroad, the ACI seeks to strengthen and accelerate the translation of melanoma control knowledge into public health action.

Biography

Vikash Sewram is the Chairperson of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on the Prevention and Control of Cancer in South Africa, the Founding Director of the African Cancer Institute and Professor of Community Health at the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Stellenbosch University, South Africa. He has obtained a PhD degree in Medicinal Chemistry and Physiology from the University of Natal in 1998, an MPH in Cancer Epidemiology (with distinction) from the School of Public Health and Family Medicine, University of Cape Town in 2002 and a PhD in Public Health: Cancer Epidemiology from the same university in 2007. In 2009 he was nominated to the Academy of Science of South Africa and in 2014 to the Permanent Scientific Committee in the Oncology Section of the World Organization for Specialized Studies on Diseases of the Esophagus. He has spent time abroad as Visiting Scientist at the International Agency for Research on Cancer in Lyon, France; School of Public Health, University of Michigan, USA and the Cancer Council NSW in Sydney, Australia. His research achievements have earned him 10 national and 9 international research awards and have resulted in numerous national and international collaborations, peer-reviewed publications, research grants and postgraduate student supervision.

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