The Importance of Regular Skin Checks: Dr Ravi on Skin Cancer Awareness in New Zealand

Ravi Naran 29 Sep 2025

Dr Ravi completed his medical training at the University of Newcastle in Australia before working at North Shore Hospital in Sydney. While initially focused on a career in emergency medicine, his early rotations in plastic surgery sparked a strong interest in practical, hands-on care. After moving back home to New Zealand, he continued his work as an emergency registrar in Auckland before transitioning into general practice.This shift opened the door to an area of medicine that combines both clinical decision-making and procedural skill - skin cancer diagnostics and treatment. Dr Ravi has undertaken, and continues to pursue further training in skin cancer medicine and dermoscopy, equipping him with the up-to-date knowledge skills to detect and manage a wide range of skin cancers in a general practice setting. He is currently completing the General Practice Fellowship Certificate of Advanced Dermatoscopy, with further training in advanced skin cancer surgery planned over the coming years. He is also an Affiliate Member of the New Zealand Skin Cancer Doctors (NZSCD) group. With skin cancer being one of the most common conditions affecting New Zealanders, Dr Ravi believes it's essential for patients to be proactive about their skin health and understands what to look for, when to get checked, and what to expect during the process.

A Common but Preventable Health Issue in New Zealand

New Zealand and Australia have some of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world. Despite how widespread it is, many people still don't prioritise regular skin checks or know what warning signs to look for.

In clinical practice, the most commonly diagnosed types of skin cancer are basal cell carcinomas (BCCs) and squamous cell carcinomas (SCCs). While melanoma occurs less frequently, it is the most serious form and can spread quickly if not identified early.

Raising awareness and encouraging early detection is key - especially since many skin cancers can be treated effectively when caught in their early stages.

Who’s Most at Risk?

Based on my experience, skin cancer most commonly affects older adults and people with fair skin, particularly those with high sun exposure from outdoor work or hobbies. But age and skin tone aren’t the whole story.One thing I’ve noticed is that older people tend to be more proactive about getting suspicious lesions checked — they’ve seen friends go through cancer, or they’ve had brushes with it themselves. Younger people, on the other hand, can be a bit more relaxed or unaware. But skin cancer doesn’t discriminate, and we need to be educating everyone — especially young Kiwis — about the risks.

What Happens During a Skin Check?

A typical skin check starts with understanding the patient’s personal and family history of skin cancer, their skin type, and any lifestyle factors that might increase their risk — like time spent in the sun for work or sport.We also ask about any specific lesions they’re worried about. While we’d love to do full-body mole maps for everyone, those are generally done at specialist centres. In the GP setting, we focus on the areas of concern and any high-risk zones.If we find something suspicious, the next steps depend on what we think it might be:

- For most non-melanoma lesions, we’ll take a small biopsy to confirm the diagnosis before deciding on treatment.
- If it looks like melanoma, we don’t take chances — we aim to excise the entire lesion straight away and get a full pathology report. Early action is key to preventing spread.

How Often Should You Get a Skin Check?

It really depends on your risk factors:

- If you’re high-risk (fair skin, history of sunburns, outdoor occupation, or family history of skin cancer), I’d recommend a skin check every 6 months.
- For full-body mole mapping, high-risk patients should aim for every 1–2 years.
- If you’re lower risk, a check every 1–2 years might be enough — but if you ever notice a change in a mole, a new lesion, or

something that just doesn’t look right, get it looked at as soon as possible.

Final Thoughts

Skin cancer is one of the most preventable - and treatable - forms of cancer when caught early. It's also one of the most common, especially here in New Zealand. Whether you're in your 20s or 70s, getting regular skin checks and staying sun smart is something we all need to take seriously. If you've never had a skin check, or it's been a while since your last one, take this as your reminder. It could save your life.

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