

## Dermatology in Brisbane



### Introduction

Over a year ago by pure chance I got in touch with Dr Mileham Hayes an Australian consultant who specialises in skin cancer. I had read a letter he had written in the BMJ and emailed him to ask about dermatology in Australia. I have been fascinated by dermatology since medical school and skin cancer is something I have been particularly interested in since doing my elective in the East African Centre for Dermatology in Tanzania and seeing a plethora of skin cancers in their albino population.

To cut a long story and month's worth of emails short we had arranged to come out to Brisbane for two weeks in November 2012 to see Dr Hayes in his "Molechex" clinic.

We had also been in touch with Professor Adele Green Deputy Director, Queensland Institute of Medical Research (QIMR) and specialist of skin cancer epidemiology. We had subsequently been searching and systematically reviewing papers in order to do a meta-analysis and systematic review looking into the effects of omega-3 and skin cancer with Professor Green.

We had very kindly been granted two weeks of "study leave" from our jobs as senior house officers in plastic surgery and had been lucky enough to receive a bursary from the British Association of Dermatologists.

### Aims

We aimed to spend some time in clinic with Dr Hayes observing the acute management of skin cancer in a very different climate, and healthcare setting to our own.

We also intended to spend large proportion of our time working at QIMR with Professor Green and her colleague Dr Catherine Olsen in order to put together a paper stating the results of the systematic review and meta-analysis.

### What we achieved

We arrived into Brisbane in the mid of a summer storm. Our plane hovered over the city and we watched the lightening erupt in the clouds nearby. We settled into our Band B and the next day dragged our, by then completely befuddled body clocks to Dr Hayes clinic.

Dr Hayes runs his Molechex clinic outside the Princess Alexandra hospital in Brisbane. In the height of summer he can see up to sixty patients a day. We joined him for a morning surgery list and an afternoon in clinic. In Australia patients get a certain amount of healthcare paid for by the state however things like regular skin checks and multiple skin surgery can be costly to patients.

We saw a number of excision biopsies and local flaps. We found the main differences to skin cancer in the UK included; the number of skin cancers per patient,

and some of the techniques used. In the plastic surgery department where we had been working in the UK anyone with a suspicious lesion had a full thickness excision biopsy. In Brisbane Dr Hayes used saucerisation to excise suspicious lesions. We were surprised to see the next day that the specimen had come back as a melanoma with a complete Breslow thickness. Dr Hayes explained he did this as not many of his patients would be able to afford to have multiple procedures and those who had travelled long distances would be reluctant to come back for a formal excision. This was a way of performing a complete excision in clinic using a minimally invasive procedure which enabled patients with benign lesions to only make one visit whilst providing a diagnosis for patients who would need to come back.

At QIMR we had an initial meeting where we met Professor Green and Dr Olsen for the first time. As we had already done the search and systematically reviewed the relevant papers back in the UK it was a matter of making a final selection of which papers we were going to include, then hitting the ground running.

We compiled an abstract introduction results methods discussion and conclusion. With the help of Catherine Olsen we performed a meta-analysis of the data. We had several meetings and over the course of two weeks were able to compile a paper which is now ready for submission.

### Reflection

These two weeks have been a fantastic opportunity and a lesson in the benefits of chance.

It was a pleasure to work with such talented and interesting people.

Dr Hayes is a vastly experienced physician and was very keen to teach us all he knew on dermatology and also jazz- we found out he had had an illustrious career as “Dr Jazz” in his heyday.

Adele Green and Catherine Olsen were always approachable and available for regular feedback. It was incredible to work on such a fast moving project and to get an insight into the exciting world of skin cancer research.

Before leaving for Brisbane we had wondered if we were doing the right thing- leaving two weeks of working in a world class plastic surgery department where we got lots of first hand practical experience. However seeing patients with a whole different level of sun exposure, seeing techniques not used in the UK and completing a paper in record time with world class researchers was an unbeatable experience.

We look forward to coming back to Brisbane in the future and working again with Adele and Catherine.

We are very excited about submitting our finished systematic review and meta-analysis and hopefully presenting it as well.