

She knows the dangers of indoor tanning

Melanoma survivor puts a face on the dangers of indoor tanning beds for young women

By Lauren La Rose

TORONTO – The spot was very dark, almost black, barely the size of a pencil eraser, and would bleed when Jackie Connors shaved her legs.

She initially chose to ignore it. But at age 20 while in nursing school and learning about the signs and symptoms of skin cancer, it soon would become a cause for concern.

“I still remember sitting at my desk thinking, ‘Wow, this is what I have,’ and still trying to put it in the back of my mind of not wanting to think that it could be that,” Connors recalled in a telephone interview from St. John’s, N.L.

Her family doctor thought she was too young to have skin cancer, but referred her to a surgeon to have the spot removed.

About a week after he’d taken it off, the surgeon called her and confirmed her initial fears — she had melanoma.

“I was devastated, I was, for a lot of reasons,” Connors recalled of her reaction. “(Not) just for the diagnosis of cancer but also knowing I couldn’t tan anymore.”

“As scary as it sounds, that was one of the things that went through my mind was: ‘Oh my gosh, I’m not going to be able to tan anymore.’”

From around age 16, Connors had fre-

quented tanning salons, paying visits three times a week. She started out first using lie-down tanning beds which took 20 minutes, then switched to the stand-up booths which took about half the time.

“I felt better, I thought I looked better with a tan, but just the feeling too, the heat, the warmth, knowing that you were tanning was one of the things I enjoyed, too.”

Now 36, Connors is part of a new campaign by the Canadian Dermatology Association which features melanoma survivors encouraging young women to learn the facts about indoor tanning.

The CDA has long advocated against indoor tanning use. But with its “Indoor Tanning is Out” campaign, launched Monday, the organization representing Canada’s dermatologists is targeting young women with its message.

The association says melanoma has become the third most common form of cancer among young Canadian women.

Connors and four other melanoma survivors in their 20s will be among those featured in posters sharing their experiences. TV and radio announcements will be aired until June, including March Break and pre-prom, when the CDA says many young people seeking tans use indoor tanning equipment.

Dr. Cheryl Rosen, national director of the



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Jackie Connors is a melanoma survivor who is featured in posters as part of a new campaign warning young women against the dangers of indoor tanning.

radiation were moved into the highest cancer risk category.

Analysis of more than 20 epidemiological studies revealed the risk of skin cancer increased by 75 per cent when the use of tanning devices starts before the age of 30, the working group found.

The group said the findings reinforced current WHO recommendations to avoid sunlamps and tanning parlours as well as to steer clear of sun overexposure.

But the president of Canada’s largest indoor tanning company disputes the links made between melanoma and UV exposure.

“As it relates to melanoma and UV light, there is correlative evidence, but correlation does not mean causation,” Doug McNabb of Fabutan Sun Tan Studios said in a phone interview from Calgary on Monday.

“There are studies that show correlation, just as there would be if you did swimming and drowning, but that does not mean causation.”

McNabb said Fabutan’s policy requires anyone between 16 and 18 to have parental consent when they purchase their tanning package. Those under age 16 must be accompanied by a parent at any tanning session.

Those who fall under skin type 1 — redheads with blue eyes — are asked not to tan. Clients are recommended to tan no more than every 48 hours, with the average session lasting between 16 and 18 minutes.

The WHO has said that in recent years, sunbeds have been manufactured that produce higher levels of UVB radiation that mimic the solar spectrum and speed the tanning process.

Shortly after the removal of the cancerous spot on her leg, Connors had to have a wider section of skin around the lesion removed. In the years since, she has had treatment for two other melanomas — one each on her neck and back — and continues to go for routine followups.

While she has stopped indoor tanning, the spots still continue to surface. She just recently had another mole removed and is awaiting diagnosis.

“They say even one bad sunburn increases your risk of melanoma by a certain number of times and your skin is damaged and those changes take place within a certain period of time,” she said. “That’s something I’ve learned to accept and that can happen at any time.”

Connors now ensures when she’s outside that she protects herself, using self-tanners along with sunscreen.

The Canadian Press

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The following are volunteer opportunities in Kitchener-Waterloo. For more information, call the Volunteer Action Centre in Kitchener at 519-742-8610.

➤ Have a passion for sports and a few hours a week? Ever considered coaching? The Special Olympics provides year-round opportunities in sports training and athlete competition in a variety of sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities. Volunteer coaches support athletes as they develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage and share their talents with their peers, families and the community. Contact 519-578-3113 or info@kwspecialolympics.org

➤ Nutrition for Learning is seeking enthusiastic volunteers to join one of the more than 100 student nutrition programs in Waterloo Region. Tasks include meal preparation, attendance, and promoting healthy food choices with children. This is an excellent opportunity to build food service skills, nutrition knowledge and the ability to work as part of a team.

Training is available in safe food handling and first aid. Time commitment is one or more hours per week based on volunteer availability and program need. Contact Brian at 519-579-5745, bkamm@nutritionforlearning.ca or www.nutritionforlearning.ca

➤ Have a desire to help those in crisis situations? Victim Services of Waterloo Region needs on-call volunteers to provide immediate crisis intervention to all victims of crime or tragic circumstance 24/7, at the scene or over the telephone. Volunteers provide valuable emotional support, practical assistance, information, education and resources.

Must be at least 19 years old and willing to make a two-year commitment. Must have a valid driver’s licence and access to a reliable vehicle. For details, contact Rose at 519-585-2363 or victimservices@wrps.on.ca

Volunteer Cambridge, a service of United Way of Cambridge and North Dumfries, offers the following opportunities. Call 519-621-1030, ext. 229 or visit www.volunteercambridge.ca

➤ Fiddlesticks Community Centre is looking for special events volunteers/committee members to assist in the planning and co-ordination of special events.

The following duties and tasks may be required: cooking, equipment set-up and take down, game/activity implementation, set-up and clean up, ticket sales, advertising, admission table, etc.

Help out at the following events: strawberry social, June; outdoor movie nights, July and August; Wild Water Days, July and August; corn roast, September and October; Christmas in the Neighbourhood, December.

Visit www.fiddlesticks.ca and contact Bernardete Moreira, co-ordinator of volunteer resources, at 519-621-4040, ext. 22 or volunteer.services@on.aibn.com

➤ Sunrise Therapeutic Riding and Learning Centre needs leaders and side walkers to help in lessons for riders with special needs.

Leaders are responsible for grooming and tacking/untacking the horse, leading the horse and following the instructor’s directions.

Leaders must have previous horse experience. Side walkers walk along side the rider providing either a physical support (as directed by the instructor) or by reinforcing the instructor’s directions.

Various shifts are available. The next scheduled volunteer training session is Friday, Feb. 26.

➤ A Taste of Italy — eighth annual All-You-Can Eat pasta dinner on Friday, Feb. 19 needs volunteers to help with set-up in the morning and serving in the evening.

Visit www.sunrise-therapeutic.ca and contact Nikki Charbonneau, lesson volunteer coordinator, at 519-837-0558, ext. 26 or nikkie@sunrise-therapeutic.ca

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