

Improving Community Health by Empowering Others

Sisters Christy Legere and Kelly Clark, owners of Magnolia's Salon in Sanford, have seen a lot of heads in more than 20 years of styling hair. There were times when they noticed moles or lesions that were changing on clients "but we didn't say anything because we didn't know how to talk to our clients about it," said Christy.

Southern Maine Health Care (SMHC) has made commitments at the local, state and national level to prevent and detect cancers early, including joining the American Cancer Society's national effort to screen 80% of patients for colon cancer by 2018 and the Maine Cancer Foundation's campaign to reduce the incidence of cancer in Maine by 20% in 2020. As part of this broad screening effort, SMHC partnered with the Cancer Care Center of York County, the Dempsey Center and the Melanoma Foundation of New England (MFNE) to offer Skinny on Skin in March 2015, an innovative skin cancer training program for hair stylists and barbers.

Christy, Kelly and four of their staff members joined more than 70 hair care professionals for the seminar where they learned about skin cancer, which sun screen products work best, how to identify suspicious moles and lesions, and how to tell a client that something is changing or doesn't look normal. The program included a presentation by Meghan Rothschild, a staff member from MFNE who had been treated for melanoma. "It was really helpful to hear what someone with potential skin cancer would want to know," said Christy.

"We were surprised to learn how prevalent melanoma is in New England, especially among younger people," added Kelly. SMHC Dermatologist Amylynn Frankel, MD, who provided the training at the Skinny on Skin seminar, noted that "New England has one of the highest rates of melanoma in the nation and it is rising. People don't think about applying sun screen on a cold or cloudy day. But you can get sun damage in any climate, so it's important to wear sun screen all of the time and a hat to protect your head, ears and face."

Seminar attendees were encouraged to share what they learned with co-workers. "Most people only see a dermatologist once a year or less," added Dr. Frankel. "It can be difficult or impossible for someone to spot a suspicious lesion on their own head. By training hair care professionals what to look for, we are increasing the chances that skin cancer can be caught early when it can be treated, especially melanomas."

Magnolia's has a staff of 12, including stylists, nail technicians and a massage therapist. Over the course of a year they see about 1,200 clients every 3 to 6 weeks. All of the staff were trained and are applying the techniques they learned. Several have recommended to clients that they be checked by their doctors.

"When you think about it, there aren't too many professions where you touch people regularly and can notice changes in places they can't easily see," said Kelly. "With that comes a responsibility. If you are getting that personal with somebody, then you owe it to them to know what you're looking for."

“By empowering hair care professionals to screen for potential skin cancers we are broadening our ability to improve the health of our communities,” said Dr. Frankel. “One melanoma spot identified is one life saved.”

To learn more about the Skinny on Skin presentation visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6cpGfBhERQg&list=PL7-XJmmgEt42VRgrjQeYPZFLV38mnpaNo&index=11>