

New Zealand foreword

The New Zealand Cancer Control Strategy Action Plan has specific actions for prevention, early detection and treatment goals that have supported the collaboration between Australia and New Zealand to develop this guideline.¹ The Early Detection Advisory Group (EDAG) recommendations² included development of a trans-Tasman management guideline that supports the recognition and management of melanoma in medical practice, and emphasises the importance of the promptness and accuracy of histological reporting. It is, therefore, pleasing that we can acknowledge the dedication of those who have contributed to the development of this guideline and the importance of this to support improved service delivery to those diagnosed with melanoma.

Malignant melanoma is an important health problem in New Zealand, with incidence and death rates being among the highest in the world. Melanoma is the fourth most common type of cancer registration for both males and females, with a total of 1896 new registrations and 249 deaths reported from the cancer registry in 2004.³

The age-standardised incidence rate for melanoma in New Zealand is approximately eight times higher in non-Māori than in Māori. However, between 1996 and 2001, the relatively small number of Māori cases had a significantly higher risk of being diagnosed at more advanced stages of disease spread than non-Māori.⁴

Analysis of New Zealand data on melanoma shows similar patterns to Australia, with the thickness of the lesion being the strongest predictor of prognosis; and in general, the thinner the lesion, the better the outcome.

Analysis of New Zealand data also shows that advanced age, non-European ethnicity and nodular and acral lentiginous types of melanoma are associated with thicker melanomas.

Implementation of these guidelines will provide challenges. However, alignment of practice with these guidelines will encourage improvements that lead to better outcomes. I encourage all those involved in the pathway of care for melanoma to continue collaboration for improvement of outcomes supported by this evidence-based guideline.

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References

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