

SOLARIUM REGULATION IN THE SPOTLIGHT

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12 NOON SUNDAY, 5 OCTOBER

Australian media coverage of Clare Oliver’s campaign against solarium tanning was full of mixed messages and missed opportunities, according to an article in the latest issue of the *Medical Journal of Australia*.

Before her death as a result of melanoma late last year, Clare Oliver initiated a campaign to regulate solaria – believing solarium tanning had caused her skin cancer.

Professor Simon Chapman, from the University of Sydney’s School of Public Health, and colleagues said they were disappointed that public health law was not changed during that high-profile window of opportunity.

The authors reviewed TV and print media coverage of the 26-year-old’s campaign and investigated how the media reported on her disease, its causes and the legacy of her campaign.

Professor Chapman said Clare Oliver’s campaign was credited with precipitating rapid regulation of solaria in Australia, but the new regulations would not prevent a person of her age or skin type visiting a solarium. “The changes fall well short of the ban she hoped for,” he said.

More than half the media reports dealt with the responsibility of solaria or their need for regulation. Eight per cent were on issues of self-responsibility, while 40 per cent of the news stories were on Clare’s legacy.

Professor Chapman said there was increasing knowledge about the health risks of solarium tanning despite the dramatic growth of the industry.

“Unlike sun exposure, solaria are an entirely tractable factor contributing to melanoma. Their demise would almost certainly be applauded by many in the community and nearly everyone in cancer control.”

Professor Chapman said the widespread publicity given to Clare’s campaign promised considerable public benefit with more than half of all the attributed media statements condemning the solarium industry.

“Viewers were invited to consider the story through the juxtaposition of the courageous melanoma sufferer and a venal, unscrupulous industry ignoring its own voluntary code and held culpable for her condition.

“Solarium use has no positive consequences beyond misguided perceptions about cosmetic benefits, so the failure to ban the industry after Clare Oliver’s campaign represented a missed opportunity,” he said.

**AVOIDABLE MELANOMA CASES COST HEALTH SYSTEM
\$3M EACH YEAR**

A related article in the same issue of the *MJA* analysed the impact that effective solarium regulation would have in Australia.

Dr Louisa Gordon, from the Queensland Institute of Medical Research, Brisbane, and colleagues said leading international health organisations were concerned about the high use of artificial tanning services and that pre-teens appeared to be ignoring sun safety messages in their desire to tan and use solaria.

Dr Gordon said the number of solarium-related businesses had increased fourfold in most Australian cities and sixfold in Melbourne since 1992. Each year, 43 melanoma-related deaths, 281 new melanoma cases and 2500 new cases of other skin cancers are estimated to be attributable to solarium use.

“The annual cost to the health system – predominantly Medicare Australia – for these avoidable skin cancer cases and deaths is about \$3 million,” she said.

“By successfully enforcing solarium regulations that ban use by people under 18 or with fair skin, favourable health and cost benefits could be expected.”

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