

COMPELLING COMMENTS

Letter to the Editor: Commentary on “Stigmatizing attitudes toward persons with psoriasis among laypersons and medical students”

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To the Editor: We read with great interest the article by Pearl et al in which the prevalence and predictors of stigmatizing attitudes among medical students and laypersons was determined.¹ They found that laypersons view psoriasis as contagious and not a serious disease while medical students had less stigmatizing attitudes. They call for educational campaigns and advertisements that could mitigate the negative opinions of laypersons towards viewing psoriatic lesions while also minimizing stereotypes and myths.¹

To further investigate the potential utility of educational campaigns, we searched for psoriasis social awareness events that had been organized in the past. We found that the National Psoriasis Foundation (NPF) created the first “National Psoriasis Awareness Month” in October 1997.² They distributed messages about psoriasis in newspapers, the radio, and TV. The primary focus of their messages was that “psoriasis is not contagious”, “it is a serious public health problem and not a joking matter”, “psoriasis is a chronic skin disorder that can be quite severe for some people, even disabling”, and “it is important for people with psoriasis to know about NPF”.² The organizers found the campaign helpful in

reaching people in certain localities and asked the public for new ideas. One of the kids participating in an NPF contest created a poster called “Psoriasis and Me” depicting psoriatic patients in an animated form while making it clear that psoriasis is not contagious. 15,000 posters were distributed to various national organizations, physician offices, and on the TV series “ER”.² They were also able to recruit a spokesperson Joe Diffie who talked about his friend who had psoriasis and how it can greatly impact a person’s life.

The Psoriasis Awareness Month was eventually moved to August because there are more topics for themes including how the sun can help psoriasis. From then on, many more social awareness campaigns sprouted. The “Show More of You” campaign organized by Celgene showcased photographs of famous people living with psoriasis to raise awareness about psoriasis and empower them to live their life courageously.³ On the World Psoriasis Day organized by the International Federation of Psoriasis Associations, brochures and flyers are distributed, awareness raising walks are organized, lectures are held, etc for the general population. The “Are You Serious” campaign organized by Janssen Biotech

had the comedian Jon Lovitz share his story about the day to day impact of psoriasis on his life. Additionally, local psoriasis support groups throughout the country organize awareness events for the public.

Although there is a history of public awareness campaigns for psoriasis, there still seems to be a gap in the layperson's understanding according to this study. Perhaps, there needs to be more frequent social campaigns occurring in specific localities with more stigmatizing attitudes. If we can get more psoriasis patients to talk about their disease, this could also help reduce the stigma and gaps in knowledge. Communicating with the NPF, dermatologists, and pharmaceutical companies regarding the data from Pearl et al is key in order to create targeted interventions for the community.

Conflict of Interest Disclosures: None

Funding: None

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