

Spotlight

By Gina Kirchweger

Non-melanoma Skin Cancer on the Rise

Birch-Johansen *et al.*

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Despite continuous efforts to inform the public about the risk of sun exposure, the rate of non-melanoma skin cancer (NMSC) is rising worldwide. Yet, the number of people diagnosed each year with the disease is uncertain because it is not routinely tracked by cancer registries. A notable exception is Denmark, which has an extensive record of NMSC cases contained in two nationwide population-based registries, thus providing Birch-Johansen *et al.* a unique opportunity to trace the incidence of NMSC for an entire, and predominantly Caucasian nation over 30 years.

Throughout the study period (1978–2007), the incidence of both basal cell carcinoma (BCC) and squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) steadily increased for both genders and in all age groups: from 46.2 cases to 121.2 cases per 100 000 person years, putting Denmark's incidence rate among the highest ever recorded in any European country. Women experienced a higher average annual incidence increase than men for both types of NMSC.

For BCC, the average annual percentage-wise increase among young persons in their twenties and thirties was significantly higher than in older persons for both men and women. High cumulative sun exposure is regarded as a risk factor for SCC and, as predicted, age-specific rates of SCC only began to increase sharply after age 50. In contrast, intermittent and high-dose sun exposure has been related to the development of BCC, which could explain the increasing age-specific incidence rates of BCC. With NMSC rates bound to rise even higher as populations age, a handful of countries, such as Germany and Austria, have begun to implement preventive measures, e.g. restricting teenagers' access to tanning salons.

Age-adjusted (World standard population) incidence rates of basal cell carcinoma (BCC) and squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) according to gender in Denmark between 1978–2007

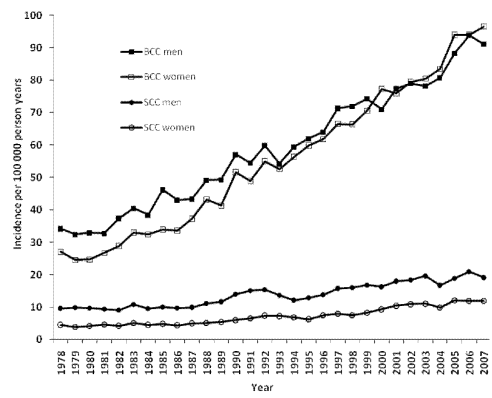


Figure 2