

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt and light-colored shorts, is captured mid-jump over the ocean waves. She is barefoot and her arms are outstretched upwards. The background shows a bright sunset or sunrise over the ocean, with a clear sky and gentle waves. The overall mood is one of freedom and joy.

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SPRING 2014

# Skin Cancer: WINNING

a Visible Battle



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So many people think dermatologists focus mainly on cosmetics. But the reality is that they are out there in the community saving lives.

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Linda Pelligra, 13-year melanoma skin cancer survivor



By Jeff De La Rosa

Annie Appleby was enjoying a sun-drenched jog on California’s Santa Monica Beach when a stranger demanded her attention. “He practically grabbed me off the path,” recalls the fitness-conscious Appleby, founder and creative director of YogaForce. “Informing me that he was a dermatologist, he pointed out a large freckle on my back, just below the strap of my bikini top and told me ‘Get it looked at immediately’.”

Florida news reporter Kate Eckman was home for Thanksgiving when her brother, a physician, noticed a dry scaly patch on her forehead. “The spot had been developing for years,” remembers Eckman. “I thought it was from touching my face, adjusting my hair. I had kept it hidden under makeup.” Eckman’s brother told her he thought it could be cancer.



Linda Pilkington Pelligra noticed a sudden change in an otherwise normal looking mole. The businesswoman and mother got to a physician as soon as possible. “I never thought I could have cancer.”

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These women are not just three of the millions of people who are diagnosed with skin cancer each year. Rather, they are survivors in the battle against a deadly disease. Not an invisible killer but a visible one, betrayed by telltale marks if one knows what to look for.

Eckman was diagnosed with basal cell carcinoma. The disease has a 99 percent survival rate, but can result in significant morbidity, including disfigurement and scarring. Appleby and Pelligra were diagnosed with melanoma, which claims thousands of lives every year. All three experienced positive >>



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outcomes, and, in the case of Abbleby and Pelligra, had their lives saved thanks to the intervention of dermatologists on the frontline of the fight against this visible killer. “So many people think dermatologists focus mainly on cosmetics,” Pelligra observes. “But the reality is that they are out there in the community saving lives.”

“The personal connection between dermatologist and patient is especially important with skin cancer,” says Hensin Tsao, MD, melanoma researcher and chairman of the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) Melanoma/Skin Cancer Committee. “Cancer is an incredibly charged diagnosis. There is a lot of fear about the future.” Appleby puts it more directly. “Cancer is a very scary word when you hear it applied to you.” Pelligra recalls sitting at a softball game wondering if it would be the last time she got to see her daughter play.

At diagnosis, Annie Appleby’s melanoma had already spread deep into the skin, and there was some fear the cancer had metastasized. Appleby recalls being lucid enough in surgery to hear the doctor announce, to her relief, “We’ve got clean margins.” Scarring was an important issue for Eckman. “It may sound superficial, but as a news anchor and model, my appearance is my livelihood.” Her dermatologist was sensitive to her concerns, providing additional treatments to reduce scarring. Emotional support also played a key role. “I was living far from my family back in Cincinnati,” she recalls. “I arrived for my surgery alone and left alone. The dermatologist and staff had to stand in for my family.”

“Great care is needed to help skin cancer patients understand their prognosis and outcome,” says Dr. Tsao. “The dermatologist must communicate effectively in talking the patient through various treatment

options.” Pelligra had the worst prognosis of the three. Her cancer had spread to the lymph nodes, which had to be removed surgically. There followed a year of treatment with interferon. She likens the medicine’s side effects to the symptoms of a severe flu that lasted all

year. “But I’m here, 13 years later,” she observes gratefully. “I’ve been seeing the dermatologist who diagnosed me ever since. She was caring and compassionate, everything I needed her to be at that time.”

All three survivors were saved through timely medical intervention by vigilant and skilled clinicians, including dermatologists. But treatment is just one front in the battle against skin cancer. Millions more lives can be saved through advances in education and awareness.

“We view skin cancer as an important problem and a purely preventable one,” says Rear Admiral Boris Lushniak, MD, a dermatologist and acting United States Surgeon General. “We know there is a small subset of people predisposed to melanoma. But for the majority of people, we think the problem could be solved with prevention.” Dr. Lushniak compares the growing public awareness of skin cancer to the drastic change in attitudes toward smoking, which began 50 years ago with the Surgeon General’s first report on the subject. “In the world that I grew up in, it seemed that everyone was smoking. Likewise, people were intentionally exposing themselves to sunlight without protecting their skin.”

“I thought that it was a joke at first,” Appleby recalls of her diagnosis. “It’s like, you’re going to die of a freckle?”

A sunworshipper in the 70s, she remembers spending hours on end outdoors without even a thought of applying sunscreen. During her college years at Berkeley in the 80s, Appleby and her sorority sisters put up mirrors on the house roof to maximize their sun exposure. “None of us really knew about skin cancer.”

Since that first Surgeon General’s report on smoking, the proportion of smokers has declined from 43 to 18 percent of the general population. Dr. Lushniak sees both the need and the potential for a

### Dermatologist tells skin cancer ‘Take a hike’

Dermatologist Ellen S. Marmur, MD, has one thing to say to skin cancer: Take. A. Hike. The outdoor enthusiast, hiker, and skin cancer survivor is backing up the strong words with stronger actions. In July 2014 she will take a 16,732 foot hike up the face of Tanzania’s Mt. Kilimanjaro to raise awareness and funds for AAD’s SPOT Skin Cancer™.

“As one who knows about the dangers of high-altitude exposure to UV, I have committed to climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro with a group of like-minded women as a visible way of educating the public about skin cancer prevention and detection,” said Dr. Marmur.

Learn more about “Skin Cancer, Take a Hike™” and how you can support the effort at (847) 240-1450.



similar shift in skin cancer awareness. People must learn to protect their skin, to wear sunscreen, and to avoid artificial tanning. He notes signs of positive change, such as seeing children playing on the beach with covered skin and wide-brimmed hats. "We're not there yet, but the tide is turning," he remarks. "People, if nothing else, realize that sunburn is dangerous, and that is a great first step."

Survivors rank among dermatologists' greatest allies in this battle. Annie Appleby's fitness company, YogaForce, has supported skin cancer awareness through ongoing advocacy, public speaking, and donating yoga mats autographed by celebrities like Jessica Biel, Timberlake and Tobey Maguire, whose signed mat raised funds for the AAD's SPOT Skin Cancer™ program last year.

Kate Eckman shared her story, including graphic depictions of her surgery, with television news viewers. "I wanted people to see the unsexy side of sunbathing, the ugly side of not caring for your skin. I would rather be someone's lesson than to have them go through it themselves."

Linda Pelligra left her job in the pharmaceutical industry to join the Melanoma Research Foundation. She remains active in the battle against skin cancer as a patient advocate. For 13 years she has been cancer free but still undergoes yearly screenings. Looking back on her struggle with skin cancer, she says, "I hate to think of all the 'what ifs'."

The Surgeon General's office has set a 10-year goal to reduce melanoma deaths by 10 percent. But in order to succeed in such goals, Dr. Lushniak explains, "we need dermatologists to take up such goals and to broadcast them. We need buy-in from the dermatological community and the public."

The Surgeon General's goal is one that dermatologists, through the American Academy of Dermatology and its SPOT Skin Cancer program, have long been committed to. Through various programs, including skin cancer screening, public awareness advertising, advocating for indoor tanning restrictions, online educational resources, and much more, the AAD and its SPOT program are working to raise awareness of detection and prevention.

Three patients fought and won a battle against this visible foe. Many more battles are out there, waiting to be won. •

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**Learn more**  
about SPOT Skin Cancer at [www.SpotSkinCancer.org](http://www.SpotSkinCancer.org).

**To support**  
the AAD's skin cancer prevention efforts visit  
[www.SupportAAD.org](http://www.SupportAAD.org).

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## Fall in Napa: An Insider's Tour

*Weekend winery experience to  
raise awareness and support for  
SPOT Skin Cancer™*

**Save the weekend of Sept. 19-21, 2014,**  
for a special event designed for wine connoisseurs. The AAD has arranged a privately curated weekend tour of some of Napa Valley's most renowned vineyards this fall. Space is extremely limited. Proceeds from this event will go to raise awareness and support for SPOT Skin Cancer.

**For more information,**  
please call (847) 240-1037.



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## CONDUCT A FREE SCREENING THIS MAY!

More than  
**228,000**  
suspicious  
lesions  
detected

**and counting thanks to the  
AAD SPOT Skin Cancer's™  
National Skin Cancer Screening program.**

The American Academy of Dermatology is asking all dermatologists to join the effort by conducting a skin cancer screening in their community in May, Skin Cancer Awareness Month. By hosting a free skin cancer screening in your community, dermatology can collectively influence positive behavior change to improve public health and, at the same time, clearly demonstrate how dermatologists offer a unique and significant value to the public.

**Free screening materials and resources**  
to help plan and promote an event are available at  
[www.aad.org/spot-skin-cancer/what-we-do/  
free-skin-cancer-screenings](http://www.aad.org/spot-skin-cancer/what-we-do/free-skin-cancer-screenings).

Take advantage of the opportunity to build awareness, potentially save lives, and share dermatology's commitment to the fight against skin cancer in your community.