Sunrise in melanoma management: Time to focus on melanoma burden in Asia

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Melanoma incidence is considerably lower in East and Southeast Asia as compared to North America or Europe; according to the latest GLOBOCAN 2012 statistics, age-standardized rates of melanoma in the region averaged about 0.4-0.5/100,000 persons, as opposed to 8.6-13.8/100,000 persons for Europe and North America. This has contributed to a general lack of awareness about the disease, with the result that melanoma remains overlooked and undertreated in Asian populations. However, it should be noted that East and Southeast Asia is home to almost one-third of the global population, and therefore a significant burden of disease exists in terms of absolute patient numbers. Furthermore, the clinical evidence indicates that Asian melanoma patients typically present with more advanced disease, and their prognosis is generally worse than Caucasian patients. In a study of 181 cutaneous malignant melanoma patients in Taiwan, 59% of patients for whom staging information was available presented with advanced melanoma (stage III or IV). Overall, median survival was 3.7 years, and the 5-year survival rate was just 45.6%, dropping to 34.7% and 0%, respectively, in patients with stage III and stage IV disease. In a Japanese study of 297 cases collected from 2002-2010, 33% presented with advanced melanoma, and the disease-specific 5-year survival rate was 74% for stage IIIA, 58% for stage IIIB, 39% for stage IIIC and 21% for stage IV. And a recent Chinese study of 140 malignant melanoma patients found that 37.9% of patients presented with advanced disease, while overall median survival was 3.9 years, and 5-year survival rates were 41.6%. In patients with stage III disease, 5-year survival rates were only 38% and 4.6%, respectively. In contrast, data from the US Surveillance, Epidemiology and End Results (SEER) Cancer Statistics demonstrated that only 8% and 4% of mel
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