

HEALTH

HEALTHBRIEFS

HEALTHWIRE

MEDICAL RESEARCH: THE RACE FACTOR

PART II By Lynne Taylor CANCER

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in the United States, but there is a great deal of variation in incidence and survival rates for different types of cancer. For example, African American men have the highest rates of cancers of the prostate and lung. Native American women have the highest incidence of cervical cancer. Japanese Americans have a rate of stomach cancer 3-to-4 times

higher than whites and Chinese Americans have a higher rate of mouth and throat cancers (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services).

Cancer research is now being directed at metabolic and genetic explanations for these varying diseases rates. Differences in genes involved in breaking down carcinogens are one possibility. A mutation in one such gene, CYP1A 1, has been associated with lung cancer risk in Asians in a number of recent studies (HHS). American Health

Foundation research (1994) found that African Americans metabolize chemicals from cigarette smoke differently than white Americans, which may be a key to their high rates of lung cancer.

In the realm of breast cancer, separate research performed at the University of Texas, Louisiana State University and George Washington University has shed new light on the reasons that African American, and to a lesser degree Latino women, die sooner from breast

cancer than white women. The largest of the studies, at the University of Texas Health Sciences Center, examined 6600 breast cancer cases. Study results showed that after breast cancer diagnosis and treatment, white women lived an average of 166 months, Latino women lived 156 months, while African American women lived only 117 months. Dr. C. Kent Osborne, one of the study's chief researchers, says that when seeking explanations for these *(See Healthwire, Page 15)*

BLACKS AT RISK FOR KIDNEY DAMAGE

Practical lifestyle changes could reduce risks of kidney damage among diabetic and hypertensive blacks.

Diabetes and hypertension are the leading causes of kidney failure, particularly in black people, said Dr. Donald Wesson of Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

Wesson recommends these changes:

- * Cutting back on salt.
- * Limiting alcohol consumption.
- * Eliminating tobacco use.
- * Controlling weight.
- * Eating more potassium-rich foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables and avoiding canned foods.
- * Exercising.

Recent studies suggest that diabetic and hypertensive black people are four to five times more susceptible to developing kidney disease than are whites with the disorders.

DARK-SKINNED PEOPLE CAN GET SUNBURNED, TOO

It is a common misconception that dark-skinned people do not get sunburned. But the sun's rays can especially be harmful to dark skin because its damaging effects are hard to detect.

Dark skin has more melanin than does light skin, said Dr. Ted Rosen, a dermatologist at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. Melanin is the pigment that gives color to skin and protects it from burning.

But melanin does not protect dark skin from the ravages of sun overexposure, Rosen said.

"On people with darker complexions, you can't see the first tinges of pink very readily," he said. "Sunburn would be easier to detect immediately if there were a sign."

PROSTATE CANCER PARTICULARLY RISKY FOR BLACKS

Prostate cancer is the most common male cancer in North America. *(See HealthBriefs, Page 20)*

Skin Cancer—If You Have Skin, You're At Risk

Debbie Fine was a pre-med student looking forward to her sophomore year in college when she found out she had skin cancer. Debbie's younger sister, Stephanie, remembers the day the skin cancer was diagnosed.

"It was unbelievable," Stephanie said. "Debbie looked and felt fine, yet after one visit to the dermatologist she was given only two months to live."

At age 21, Debbie Fine died of malignant melanoma, the most deadly form of skin cancer. This year the number of cases of melanoma is expected to reach 34,100, and about one American an hour will die of the disease.

What Debbie and sister Stephanie didn't realize at the time was that Debbie's fair skin, unusual moles and family history of melanoma put her at high risk for developing the disease.

"As children, we spent most of our summers in the sun without adequate protection," Stephanie said. "At that time, we didn't know how dangerous it was. Now we know more and can take precautions to help prevent this awful disease. I've also learned what signs to look for and how to keep a watchful eye on my own skin."

Melanoma is more common than any other type of cancer among people between 25 and 29 years old. This isn't surprising when you learn that the hazards of sun exposure are cumulative, and half of most people's lifetime of sun exposure occurs by age 18.

But skin cancer can be cured if detected early and—here's the best news—skin cancer is one of the easiest cancers to detect. By examining your skin from head to toe, you just might save your life.

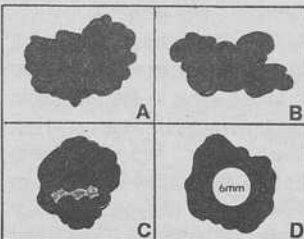
Skin self-examination involves periodically looking over the skin for any changes in the size, color, shape or texture of a mole; the development of a new mole or any other unusual changes in the skin. Any of these signs should be reported immediately to a dermatologist or personal physician.

In addition to self-examination, the American Academy of Dermatology and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend the following precautions to reduce the risk of developing skin cancer:

- Avoid "peak" sunlight hours—10

LOOK FOR DANGER SIGNS IN PIGMENTED LESIONS OF THE SKIN

Consult your dermatologist immediately if any of your moles or pigmented spots exhibit:



A Asymmetry—one half unlike the other half. **B Border irregular**—scalloped or poorly circumscribed border. **C Color varied**—shades of tan and brown; black; sometimes white, red or blue. **D Diameter larger than 6mm** as a rule (diameter of pencil eraser).

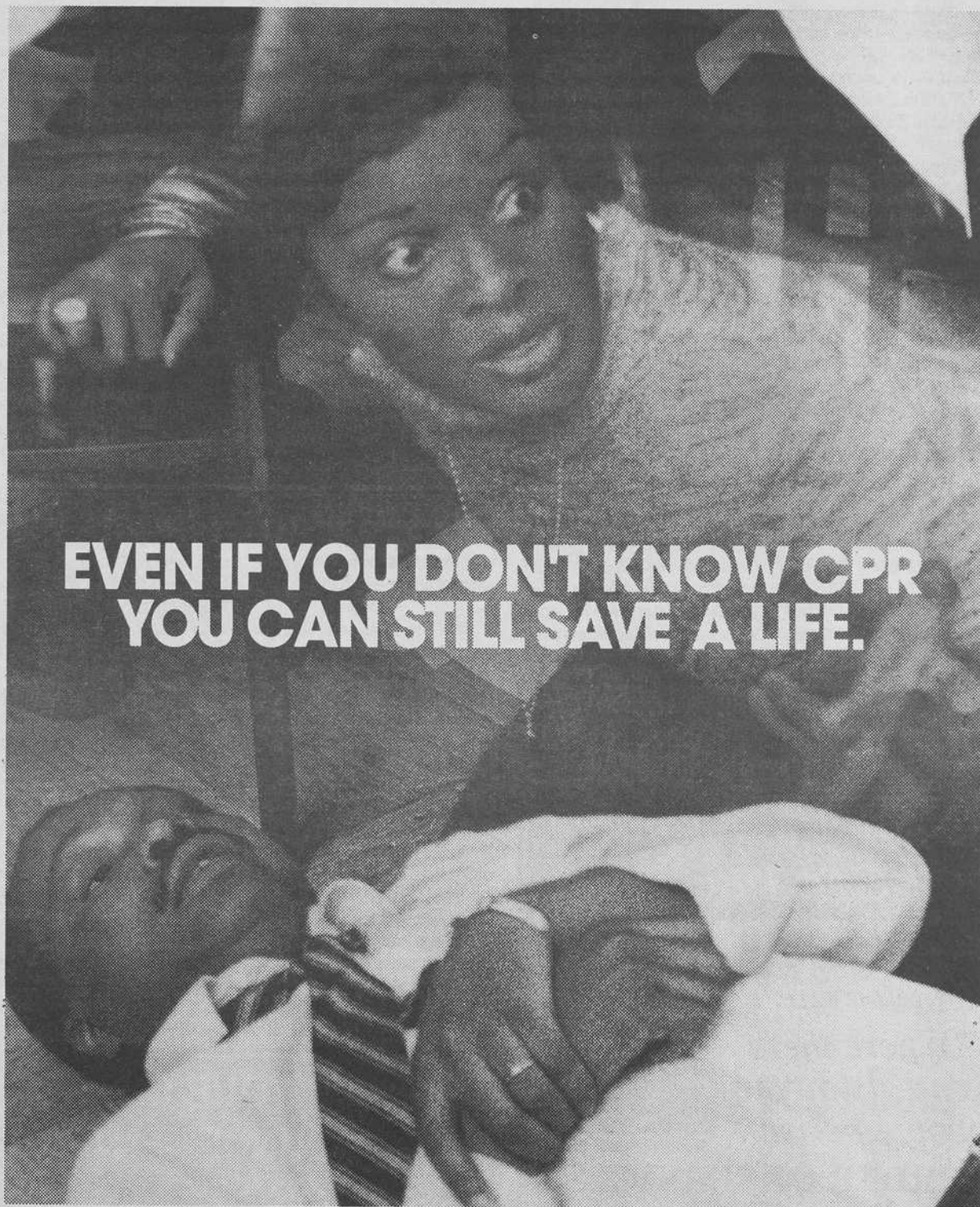
MIND THESE ABCD's
They may be signs of malignant melanoma.

a.m. to 4 p.m.—when the sun's rays are most intense.

- Apply a sunscreen with a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of at least 15, about 15-30 minutes before going outdoors, and reapply it every two hours, especially when playing, gardening, swimming or doing other outdoor activities.

- Wear protective clothing, including sunglasses that absorb 99 percent to 100 percent of the full UV spectrum, a hat with a brim and long-sleeved shirt and pants, during prolonged periods of sun exposure.

"I used to love the look of a tan, but that was before I knew the consequences," Stephanie said. "I still like to spend time outdoors, but I'm smarter about it. I take steps to try to prevent what happened to my sister from happening to me or anyone else I care about."



EVEN IF YOU DON'T KNOW CPR YOU CAN STILL SAVE A LIFE.



In an emergency, help isn't on the way unless someone calls. So don't think of what you can't do, think of what you can do. Call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number. Don't hesitate, even if you're alone.



To learn more about life-saving techniques, call your Red Cross.

