



ESTHER BUSH

Skin Health

This month, the “Take Charge of Your Health Today” page focuses on the importance of your skin and its relationship to your health. The current COVID-19 pandemic has caused hospitals and community clinics to use tools like telehealth and virtual appointments to help care for patients. Erricka Hager and Bee Schindler, community engagement coordinators, CTSI, and Esther L. Bush, president and CEO of the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, spoke about this topic.

EH: Good afternoon, Ms. Bush. This month we’re taking a more specific look at a health topic that sometimes doesn’t get much attention—skin health. I think it’s an important topic for us to discuss, especially when our community might not understand the importance of protecting their skin from the sun. In the overview, Alaina J. James, MD, PhD, assistant professor of dermatology, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, reminds us why it’s crucial to wear sunscreen.

EB: It sure is, Erricka. I’m glad that this page helps to debunk myths about different medical topics. Dr. James goes on to mention that African American communities still suffer from disparities in skincare. These disparities include limited access to dermatologists or physician observations and some people having little to no insurance.

BS: Yes, Ms. Bush. I think it’s important to mention that dermatologists and their perceptions play a major role in the increase of skin-care disparities. Dermatologists should be mindful that skin cancer can look different with African American patients. Different presentations of skin cancer can cause delayed diagnosis and treatment. Questioning your doctor about bumps or spots that you notice on your body could help to flag issues. Results from the Health Information National Trends Survey show that misperceptions about skin cancer are higher in African American communities. It’s important for people to understand how skin cancer plays a large and scary role so that they can advocate for themselves by taking small steps to lower their overall risks.

EB: I’m curious: What are researchers doing to dispel some of these misperceptions about skin cancer? I’m sure Dr. James and others at the University of Pittsburgh are identifying ways to address these misperceptions.

EH: Absolutely, Ms. Bush. I think the key thing to combat these misperceptions is education. Education for both patients and providers will help to reduce skin health disparities. Dr. James has created a wonderful program called MobileDerm. MobileDerm uses a telehealth model that allows the dermatologist to care for their patients virtually after first meeting in person. I think what’s unique about MobileDerm is that it provides direct education to communities in spaces where they feel comfortable. MobileDerm is essentially meeting people where they are.

BS: I second that, Erricka. Education is crucial for all sides. We often encourage our readers to get involved with research studies but rarely provide similar requests for providers. While it is important to increase the knowledge and awareness of skin health in African American communities, providers and researchers must also do their parts. It’s vital that providers listen to and honor patients’ inquiries about skin health and then have the same level of follow-up that they would have with their white patients.

EB: Thank you so much for your time and thoughts, Bee and Erricka. As usual, we have continued to provide our readers with the necessary resources to help them navigate the changing landscape due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I look forward to hearing your thoughts next month as we discuss vaccine trials and the community.

Take Charge Of Your Health Today. Be Informed. Be Involved.

MobileDerm addresses disparities in skin health

Skin is the largest organ in the human body. It helps to regulate body temperature, boosts body immunity and provides sensation. It is our body’s first barrier against disease and infection. As such, it is important to remember to protect skin and keep it healthy. Protecting skin includes keeping it moisturized, seeing a dermatologist for any concerns and using sunscreen.

One of the most basic ways to protect skin is to be aware of sun exposure. Though sunlight can feel good, uplift our mood and provide the body with essential vitamin D, its ultraviolet (UV) radiation is harmful to skin. It can cause wrinkles and other skin damage and is a major risk factor for skin cancer for everyone.

“All skin types and colors have to be protected from the sun using clothing or sunscreen and by not using tanning beds [which use UV rays],” says Alaina J. James, MD, PhD, assistant professor of dermatology, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. “People of color who may not burn with sun exposure still need to use sunscreen—at least SPF 30, reapplying every two hours and making sure they are using zinc- or titanium-based sunscreens.”

Dr. James reminds us that, while people of color may have a lower risk of developing skin cancer, their risk of becoming ill and dying from skin cancer is greater than that of other people. This disparity exists partly because people in Black and Brown communities often receive a diagnosis very late in the disease process. She says that access to care, insurance coverage and provider awareness are barriers to health care and contribute to disparities in skin health.

To address some of these disparities in skin health, Dr. James has created a program called MobileDerm. For a number of years, providers in the field of dermatology have successfully used telemedicine for purposes like looking at a patient-provided photo of a mole (a model of care that has prepared them well for the physical distancing required during the COVID-19 pandemic). But a care model she has developed in the past few years takes telemed-



ALAINA J. JAMES, MD, PHD

icine one step further toward skin health equity.

To improve access to dermatologic services, Dr. James, Pitt medical students and UPMC dermatology residents are doing outreach dermatology clinics in Pittsburgh community health centers. Dr. James developed MobileDerm, a program where dermatology health care providers meet patients where they are—in community-based health centers and clinics where patients have easier access and are often more comfortable.

“There aren’t many dermatologists in general,” says Dr. James. “Many are concentrated in bigger cities, which leaves people in outlying or lower-resource communities without a dermatologist in their community. We’re seeing that people who don’t have easy access to dermatologists have skin problems that go on for a long time and are much worse than they need to be. We want MobileDerm to help reduce that wait time.”

Dr. James thinks that meeting patients in the patients’ communities helps to build and sustain relationships and trust.

“There is something special and empowering about partnering with a community and learning about that community and trying to develop a relationship with patients and local providers,” she says. “Having discussions about things that I may

not know or understand about a community is important. Once we build relationships through in-person, face-to-face contact and discussion, from there we can follow up using different tele-visits and video platforms.”

Dr. James sees even international trips she has done to provide dermatological care as influencing MobileDerm’s model of care. During a service trip to Honduras in 2019, she and a dermatology team of Pitt undergrads, medical students and residents would diagnose and treat many patients at a full-service, pop-up dermatology clinic with onsite pharmacy and procedures. Dr. James would like to recreate this traveling dermatology service program in our local Pittsburgh area and neighboring rural communities.

Overall, Dr. James wants people to remember that their role in skin health—gentle hair and nail care, noting concerning skin lesions, rashes or nonhealing wounds, and as well as guarding against UV exposure—is essential. With increased sun protection, people’s vitamin D levels, which are important for a healthy immune system and strong bones, are often lower. It is important to eat nutritious, vitamin D-rich foods and monitor vitamin D levels. Recent COVID-19 studies suggest that very low vitamin D levels may be associated with severe Covid-19 infections. Skin health is not just acne, warts or mole checks (see information on moles elsewhere on the page); skin can sometimes reflect what is going on inside the body. Many systemic diseases can present with changes in the skin. Dermatologists can help coordinate health care with other health care providers to make sure patients are receiving the proper treatment.

Lastly, Dr. James wants people to know that, despite COVID-19 physical distancing, if they are having urgent skin problems, providers are available for in-person patient appointments, as well as video visits and E-Dermatology. She and the UPMC dermatology team are here to help and serve communities.

UPMC makes shift to telemedicine solutions

Hospitals around the world look to technology to help them care for patients and to help limit the potential for exposure to the novel coronavirus. Telemedicine is taking off in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. A similar trend is underway at UPMC. Because of the organization’s significant investments in laying the groundwork for telemedicine over the last few years, UPMC is positioned to meet new demands.

UPMC has experienced a massive shift in patient volume to its primary telemedicine solutions, MyUPMC Video Visits and UPMC AnywhereCare. Last year, UPMC expanded its telemedicine capabilities to surgeons and other physicians

who perform medical procedures. In 2020, UPMC quickly provided telemedicine capabilities to the vast majority of its primary care physicians. These strategic decisions prepared the system for the rapid escalation of telemedicine because of COVID-19. This preparation has enabled UPMC to continue to provide quality care, safely, during the pandemic.

UPMC is encouraging patients to schedule appointments with their primary care physicians and specialists as virtual video visits through MyUPMC. This tele-ICU (intensive care unit) capability is making it easier to provide the very highest level of care to more patients.

“Telemedicine has worked so well that

it’s unlikely providers will switch back to the old way of performing medicine for certain patient populations post-crisis,” says Carla Dehmer, director of telemedicine, UPMC. “More patients will receive high-quality care within the convenience of their own homes. Patients will be able to see their providers without having to find transportation, child care or take time off from work. The way we perform medicine will forever be changed. And UPMC is ready.”

As needs change and develop, UPMC will continue to be at the forefront of technological care to ensure that the community is cared for, both now and into the future.

Check <https://www.chp.edu/our-services/mobile-medical-clinic/schedule> for the most up-to-date

locations and dates this summer!

All clinics run from 10AM – 2PM

Neighborhood	Location	Dates
Chartiers	Chartiers Early Childhood Center 3799 Chartiers Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15204	June 8 th & 10 th
Clairton	Family Dollar 533 Miller Ave, Clairton, PA 15025	June 4 th
Coraopolis	Cornell School District 1099 Maple St, Coraopolis, PA 15108	August 31 st
Homestead/Munhall	Steel Valley Middle School 3114 Main St, Munhall, PA 15120	July 27 th & 29 th
Homewood	Homewood-Brushton YMCA 7140 Bennett St, Pittsburgh, PA 15208	June 25 th & July 23 rd
Natrona Heights	Allegheny Valley YMCA 5021 Freeport Rd, Natrona Heights, PA 15065	July 2 nd & August 6 th
New Castle	New Castle Jr/Sr High School 300 E Lincoln Ave, New Castle, PA 16101	July 20 th & August 19 th
New Kensington	Valley Points Family YMCA 800 Constitution Blvd, New Kensington, PA 15068	June 22 nd & July 16 th
North Side	Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh 10 Children’s Way, Pittsburgh, PA 15212	June 17 th & July 15 th
Penn Hills	Penn Hills Family Care Connection 10 Duff Rd, Penn Hills, PA 15235	June 18 th & July 31 st
Wilksburg	Wilksburg School District 718 Wallace Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15221	June 19 th & July 13 th

Don’t let your child fall behind on their needed immunizations.

UPMC Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh, UPMC Children’s Community Pediatrics, and Ronald McDonald House Charities of Pittsburgh and Morgantown are partnering to bring needed vaccines, safely, to western Pennsylvania communities.

Look for the Ronald McDonald Care Mobile in your community.