

## *May is Skin Cancer Awareness Month*

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States with more than one million skin cancers diagnosed annually in the United States. More than 90 percent of those are directly related to overexposure to the sun.

Skin cancer is classified in three basic types, basal cell, squamous cell and melanoma. More than 80 percent of all skin cancers are the most common type, basal cell. Chronic overexposure to the sun is the cause of 95 percent of all basal cell carcinomas, which occur most frequently on exposed parts of the body. This type of cancer has tripled in U.S. women under age 40 in the last 30 years.

Squamous cell skin cancer will be diagnosed in 250,000 Americans each year. This type of skin cancer involves cells deeper in the skin and occurs most frequently on the face, neck, scalp, hands, shoulders, arms and back.

Melanoma, the most serious type of skin cancer, will account for more than 62,000 cases of skin cancer in the U.S. in 2006 and of the 10,700 skin cancer deaths each year in America, nearly 8,000 will result from this type of cancer. Melanoma is a malignant tumor occurring in the cells, which produce the pigment color in the skin. Increased risk for melanoma depends on several factors including sun exposure, number of moles on the skin, skin type and family history. In Kansas, 513 new cases of melanoma were diagnosed in Kansas in 2005 and 93 people died of the disease. Doing a skin check and watching moles and brown spots and growths are your best protection. The **ABCDEs** of melanoma include watching moles and spots for changes such as:

- **A**symmetry- if you draw a line through a mole the two halves should match

- **Border-** the border of early melanomas tend to be scalloped or notched.
- **Color-** shades of brown, tan or black can appear as well as red, white or blue areas within a mole.
- **Diameter-** melanomas are larger in diameter than the eraser of a pencil
- **Evolving-** and changes in the size, shape, color or elevation of a mole or a mole that bleeds, itches or crusts, could be an early sign of melanoma.

Taking some common sense steps to protect yourself from the sun can prevent skin cancer later in life. Rub on sunscreen to protect exposed skin, even in cloudy weather. Choose a sunscreen and a lip balm with a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 15 or higher .Use sunglasses that block as close to 100 percent of both UVA and UVB rays from the sun to protect the eyes and prevent cataracts later in life. Wear a hat that shades your face, ears, scalp and neck and clothing with a tight weave. Avoid exposure to the sun between the peak hours of 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.