

Late-stage melanoma results in economic burden

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In an article published in the March 2010 *Archives of Dermatology*, researchers report that in the United States, melanoma treatment in late stages of the disease is of significant cost in the population 65 years and older.

The incidence of [melanoma](#) has risen dramatically over the years, and older white men have the highest rate of mortality. Epidemiologists say that one in 49 men and one in 73 women are affected in a lifetime, in contrast to one in 1,500 persons in the 1930s. The American Cancer Society reports that melanoma is the sixth most commonly diagnosed cancer in the United States.

"We already know the more quickly melanoma can be detected and treated, the lower the mortality rate," says Suephy C. Chen, MD, MS, assistant professor in the Department of Dermatology at Emory University School of Medicine, and principal investigator of the study.

"The data from this study help show that early detection is also very important in decreasing the [economic burden](#) from melanoma, especially in the older population."

The researchers gathered data from the Surveillance, Epidemiology and End Results (SEER)—Medicare-linked population-based database for fiscal years 1991-1996 of persons 65 years or older who had late-stage melanoma. Their findings showed that average monthly, per-patient melanoma charges were \$2,194 during the initial four months of

treatment; dropped to \$902 during the interim phase; but increased to \$3,933 during the terminal six months of treatment.

The study authors concluded from the data that if all patients were diagnosed and treated in stage 0 or 1, the annual direct costs for the population 65 years or older would be between \$99 million and \$16 million - 40-65 percent of the current costs of \$249 million.

"The US population is aging rapidly," explains Chen. Routine screening of these individuals to diagnose melanoma before it reaches an advanced stage will not only impact the physical outcome, but could also vastly reduce the [financial burden](#) of the disease."

More information: Economic Burden of Melanoma in the Elderly Population, Arch Dermatol/Vol 146 (No. 3) March 2010

Provided by Emory University

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