

Skin cancer risk identified for organ transplant recipients

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Muba Taher poses with long-time patient Dennis Greacen, who has received a number of islet transplants to treat his diabetes, and has since had two types of skin cancer.

(PhysOrg.com) -- Muba Taher, a clinical assistant professor in the Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry at the University of Alberta, is doing what he can to protect organ-transplant patients from a particular vulnerability: this group is highly susceptible to skin cancer.

In fact, patients who have received solid organs—rather than tissue transplants—are 65 times more likely to develop squamous cell carcinoma; according to the AT-RISC Alliance (After Transplantation-Reduce Incidence of [Skin Cancer](#)), they are 10 times more likely to develop basal cell carcinoma, and are at three times the risk of melanoma, a deadly form of skin cancer.

To combat this frightening trend, Taher has started a new clinic at the University of Alberta dermatology center, with a focus on early screening and treatment for those at risk, often because of the suppression to their immune systems.

“We know that these patients are at increased risk for skin cancer; they grow more-aggressive cancers faster,” said Taher. “I’m hoping that by providing an outlet where they can be screened and rapidly treated.”

Seven to nine per cent of skin cancers in transplant recipients will spread and once it has, less than half of [transplant recipients](#) survive over two years.

The clinic just started in January and the patient load is slowly increasing as Taher gets the word out to his colleagues in transplantation.

“They’re very happy to know that there’s a clinic that will focus on this issue,” said Taher. “Transplant patients have many things going on in their lives, and my colleagues are busy keeping their organ function going, so I’m happy to play the part of looking after that other element.”

The U of A couldn’t be a better place to do this, considering it is a major transplantation center performing an average of 256 transplants a year over the last five years according to University of Alberta Hospital transplant services.

“It’s good access for the liver, the renal, the lung and cardiac transplant patients who are already familiar with the University of Alberta hospital,” said Taher.

In very severe cases, recipients who develop cancer will sometimes develop up to 100 skin cancers per year.

“I hope that one of the spinoffs from this clinic is public education,” said Taher. “Just having the word out there that there is such a clinic hopefully reminds these patients that the skin cancer risk is something they should be aware of and there are resources to deal with these problems.”

For now the clinic is running once a week, on Wednesdays, at the U of A dermatology centre in the Clinical Sciences Building. Taher is the only dermatologist on staff but he’s hoping for a high demand and expansion of the clinic.

“Once we get this more established I hope it’s in a timeslot where I can have students with me and they can pick up an interest in this field too,” said Taher. “There’s a lot of room for growth for these patients.”

Provided by University of Alberta

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