

New skin cancer checking software set to benefit survivors

May 26 2014, by Euan Wemyss



ASICA software educates guides patients through a self-skin examination

Skin cancer survivors are to be aided in checking for signs of the condition returning by new technology developed by experts at the University of Aberdeen.

Initially targeted at those living in remote and [rural areas](#), the software will educate out-patients in how to carry out self-examinations and enable them to send images of skin abnormalities directly to specialists.

The Achieving Self-directed Integrated Cancer Aftercare (ASICA) project is collaboration between computer scientists and healthcare specialists as part of the dot.rural RCUK Digital Economy Hub.

"People who have had [skin cancer](#) are advised to see a specialist every 3-6 months for up to 10 years after the diagnosis, to check for signs the condition hasn't returned," explains Dr Peter Murchie, a clinical consultant at the University. "For people in [remote areas](#), such as Orkney, this can involve a great degree of travel and disruption.

"ASICA is an experimental study to see if there are opportunities to carry out the check-ups, at least in part, remotely."

Participants in the scheme will receive a text message once a month instructing them to examine their skin.

A supplied tablet will play an instructional animation which goes through the examination process in detail, advising on the areas of the body to check and examples of things to look out for. It also maintains a gallery of images of the patient's skin so they can see if there have been any changes since the last examination.

If nothing of concern is found, the patient sends a message to a dermatology specialist nurse based at Dr Gray's hospital in Elgin for them to log. If any abnormality is discovered, however, the patient takes a photo of the area and sends it directly to a specialist.

"The specialist will be able to advise whether or not the patient needs to come in for a full consultation, or whether it's fine, and doesn't require further examination," adds Dr Murchie. "Alternatively, they could be asked to make an appointment with their local GP, at which the specialist can remotely participate in via Jabber (NHS Scotland's secure videoconference technology)."

Dr Murchie adds: "The examination process can be quite intensive – you have to check inside the ears, and beneath nail beds, for example. As well as hopefully reducing the need for travelling long distances to visit specialists, ASICA should also educate patients on how to carry out self-examinations and the warning signs they should be aware of and take action about

"The initiative has obvious benefits for those living in rural and remote areas, but if it proves successful there is no reason why it couldn't be used by patients living in urban areas as well."

Volunteer patients started trialling the software this month in conjunction with their regular appointments with specialists.

Provided by University of Aberdeen

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