



Consequences of Solariums

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How many of you dream of having a perfect tan? What are you willing to risk in order to obtain this bronzed appearance? Would you resort to solariums? Imagine if your desire to look tanned overtook your life and you became addicted, only to be diagnosed with melanoma cancer!

A young woman's tragic death that occurred due to solarium use shocked the nation and encouraged the Victorian Government to respond at a rapid rate. Claire Oliver's heart-breaking case prompted the State Government to unleash harsh consequences against solariums shortly after her death. I am firmly of the opinion that strict solarium restrictions should be in place nationally and awareness campaigns should be broadcasted, as the ideological notion of the misconception and stereotype of the bronzed Aussie is a force manipulating the young generation of Australians today.

The image of the bronzed Aussie swept the nation, as a tan was viewed as healthy, cool, the ultimate fashion accessory, which was extremely popular among young Australians. This idea began in the 1950s and it is unfortunate that this stereotype is still evident today. This ideology of a fit young person was privileged in Claire's case as the media today constantly foregrounds this concept. Claire was of the opinion that a glowing complexion caused her death as she fell under the trap of peer pressure, television, magazine and media influences. Claire was quoted in the *Herald Sun*, 'My mum told me

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it was abnormal to get in a box and fry myself, but I told her it was cool and everyone was doing it'. Let's go back to Claire's point of view for a moment. She assumed that a tan was healthy and made a social statement, which in turn gave her melanoma at a young age.

It emerged that Claire was uninformed concerning the facts and consequences regarding solarium use. In reality, the UV radiation produced by a solarium can be five times as strong as the midday summer sun; facts like these are conveniently avoided by solarium owners in order to ensure that the public remains unaware of the dangers. Did you know that a UV index in a solarium is 60, whereas in Victoria the UV index is only 16?! Many consequences and health hazards arise from dangerous solarium use; for example, skin loses elasticity, sagging and discolouration. Eye damage is crucial when exposed to such UV radiation; the cornea and conjunctiva of your eye becomes inflamed and permanently damaged. Also individuals on medications or antidepressant drugs increase their sensitivity to UVA radiation, which causes severe sunburn, rashes and loss of pigmentation, according to the Cancer Council. Is a golden tan really worth the extreme consequences such as the loss of sight, rashes and severe sunburn?

The discourse of health is evident in relation to solariums. Although the ideas associated with solarium use are of poor health, this has negative connotations which the Australian Government is totally oblivious to. The Cancer Council in Victoria performed a survey in late December and exposed that 14% of women aged 18 to 30 were convinced that solariums were safer than the beach. Furthermore, the survey discovered that 29% of the women interviewed have used a solarium at least once, while one in 10 women intended to use a solarium in the next twelve months. Deaths occur at such an alarming rate due to unawareness. Scores of people wonder why vast numbers of individuals' contract melanoma disease. The majority were solarium users and were not notified of the facts or details regarding the damage that solariums can inflict. Approximately 1600 people die from skin cancer annually, and most claim that they were unaware and uninformed by negligent solarium

owners. In Claire's interview she stated that, 'The girl working at the tanning salon told me the fastest way to get a tan was to come in every second day and use speed cream'. This proves that solarium owners are selfish, business orientated and driven by profit. Our government needs to step up and save lives by simply establishing a controversial ad campaign across various media mediums. In addition, the organisation of guest speakers to attend high schools and speak out about the hazards and threats associated with solarium use.

Advertising campaigns should be broadcast nationally in order to alert the youth of our nation. There are already numerous advertising campaigns associated with the Cancer Council, which unfortunately do not cover a broad community perspective as the majority of the advertising is concentrated on one specific Internet site. This further validates the issue that education does not extend to the sector of the community, our youth, which is in dire need of enlightenment. I believe our government should create additional advertising material across mediums that are relevant, visual and accessible to youth. This appears to be a higher priority than some other current campaigns currently in production.

New legislations have been enforced in Victoria. For example, new, tougher restrictions such as people under 18 years of age require parental approval and also those with fair skin must have a skin analysis completed prior to treatment. However, I believe that these legislations should be mandatory across the nation, and all people under the age of 18 should be prohibited from using solariums, period. Consider this, here in Australia we are given the rights to vote and drink once we reach the mature age of 18, so why should those under 18 be allowed to make life-altering decisions that are extremely detrimental to overall health and wellbeing?

To further monitor and regulate the solarium usage a national data base, similar to the one employed by chemists to control the sale of cold and flu medicine, should be implemented to keep a record of clients' use of solariums and monitor and dangerous solarium habits. In addition, clients should sign legal documents that outline the crucial consequences and

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outline the damaging rays expelled by solariums to ensure that they are entirely educated on the situation before proceeding.

So what solutions should the Government put in place to decrease the deaths attributed to melanoma and solarium use? I believe all solarium owners should clearly explain the risks and hazards of solariums before individuals resort to this form of tanning. With the implementation of increased advertising across appropriate mediums, an education campaign, tougher regulations, a national patron database and heavy government participation, tragic and pointless deaths such as Claire's can be avoided in the future. So now I ask of you, would you resort to solariums?

Web site

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BO8ConuZ50E&feature=related>



Kristina Kho wrote this in 2008 when she was in Year 11 at St Thomas More College in Queensland.