

# Know Common Tanning Salon Myths So You Can Protect Your Patients

When it comes to UV safety, consumer investigators find that most tanning facilities don't know fact from fiction. Do your patients?

By Paul Winnington, Editor-in-Chief

In his commentary in this month's Point/Counterpoint (p. 50), Michael Franzblau, MD describes a study he and his colleagues conducted to assess tanning salon compliance with health and safety regulations. They found numerous facilities failed to make the grade.

This month's issue of *Consumer Reports* includes a report of a similar investigation by publication staff who called tanning facilities nationwide with questions about the safety and potential benefits of tanning.<sup>1</sup> The results may be eye-opening for derma-

tologists. Just one percent of parlors surveyed answered all questions correctly.

## False Information

*Consumer Reports* says that tanning facility employees made false statements, including claims that tanning does not cause skin cancer or premature aging. Additionally, some salon representatives said they would permit tanning without use of protective eyewear by the customer. Several sites said they would provide tanning to minors without parental consent. Note, howev-

er, that consent isn't mandated in some locales.

In addition to these false claims and unsafe practices identified at parlors nationally, there's ongoing promotion of vitamin D as a key to good health and even a weight-loss aid. Several vitamin D websites are now on-line, encouraging patients to get ample sunlight or UV exposure to permit proper synthesis of the vitamin. Several websites offer "the latest research" on vitamin D deficiency and encourage ample sun exposure for patients.

Dermatologists know the true dangers of UV exposure, but it may be wise to formulate responses to the numerous false and misleading information and claims patients are bound to encounter. ❏

1. Indoor Tanning: Unexpected Dangers. *Consumer Reports*. February 2005:30-33.

## Health Claims by the Tanning Industry

Are you prepared to debunk popular tanning claims? One national tanning chain posts "Benefits of Tanning" on its website—most of them related to health. The following is a listing of the supposed benefits with a summary of the posted rationale. No references are available on the site.

Alleged Benefit	Rationale
Body weight	Thyroid stimulation boosts metabolism.
Psoriasis	"80% of sufferers show improvement with UV exposure."
Stress	Decreases adrenaline levels and releases endorphins.
Seasonal Affective Disorder	Improves "cabin fever or winter blues."
Acne	"Helps clear the skin."
Vanity	"You will look terrific."

## New in Your Practice

**Action Shot.** Researchers now have a better idea how melanoma vaccines exert their effects, thanks to two recent articles in the *Journal of Experimental Medicine* (201;2: 241-248, 249-257). The studies suggest that vaccination may stimulate activity in antitumor T cells that can then contribute to tumor rejection. Although studies had previously documented efficacy with vaccination, the mechanism of action was unclear.