



THE EUROMELANOMA

Skin Cancer Patient Charter

This charter captures a set of ten behaviours – identified and agreed upon by the Euromelanoma network of dermatologists – to guide interactions with skin cancer patients from the point of diagnosis through to the conclusion of their physical and psychological care.

How patients are treated and communicated with impacts their feelings, their understanding of their situation and choices – and potentially therefore, their outcomes and quality of life. We know getting this right is essential, so we commit to these best practices whole-heartedly.

- 1. BE PRESENT** – The information we share is often serious and sensitive in nature. This should always be done in person – never via a call or message. Arrange a private and quiet place to meet, free from interruptions where you can talk as one human being to another.
- 2. BE GENEROUS** – Create sufficient time and space to meet the full cognitive and emotional needs of your patient. They should not leave with unanswered questions, and will probably need to come back as new ones occur to them. Schedule time in advance to do that.
- 3. BE EMPATHETIC** – Being given a scary diagnosis or a poor prognosis can evoke strong emotions from patients. Take great care with their feelings and recognise that, when emotions are high, the ability to hear and comprehend information can be impaired.
- 4. BE HONEST AND REALISTIC** – Showing empathy does not mean being less honest about the severity of the patient's condition or prognosis. Offering false hope or premature reassurance must be resisted.
- 5. BE CLEAR AND DIRECT** – Greater understanding leads to better prognosis awareness, reduced patient anxiety and improved adherence with treatment recommendations. Give the patient information in small bites and without the use of jargon.
- 6. BE OPEN AND RESPONSIVE** – Move back and forth between providing recognition and guidance, using an interactive, rather than lecturing, style. Patients should feel empowered to ask questions during the consultation.
- 7. BE FLEXIBLE** – Remain in charge of the dialogue, but be flexible in how you deliver the required information. Find out what the patient understands is happening medically, and discover what they want to know in order to make informed decisions.
- 8. BE INFORMED** – Patients expect recommendations from their doctor on how best to treat their illness. That means being up to date on the latest research and treatment options related to their cancer or condition.
- 9. BE PREPARED** – Be ready to inform the patient about the range of available treatments and, wherever possible, organise all next steps in advance of the meeting. Ideally, any follow up appointments should be pre-booked – for example, for scans or with surgeons or psychologists.
- 10. BE EQUIPPED** – Many patients find it difficult to initially absorb and process information immediately after diagnosis, so have educational material for the patient to read and review later. The Euromelanoma website is a useful resource for people with a skin cancer diagnosis.