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Short Communication

A Prime minister managed to attract elderly men in a Belgian Euromelanoma campaign

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Over the past decades, melanoma incidence has been increasing markedly in Europe, and continues to do so in most European countries.¹ Fortunately, melanoma mortality did not rise as much as incidence, especially among females trends in mortality rates are almost flat. However, mortality rates among (elderly) men are on the rise.^{1,2} Men have long been known to have a worse prognosis of melanoma, and often present with thicker and nodular melanomas.^{3,4} These observations indicate that prevention efforts should be more specifically aimed at reducing male melanoma mortality.

Euromelanoma is a melanoma campaign initiative mobilising an increasing number of countries in Europe. This campaign was initiated in Belgium in 1999,⁵ and consists of a media campaign in which information about melanoma risk factors and groups at high(er) risk of developing melanoma is given, and people are encouraged to visit one of the participating dermatologists for a free skin examination.^{5–9}

Every year, to focus more on a specific prevention aspect (primary or secondary), a new central theme for the media campaign accompanying the screening day is chosen, focusing either on a primary or secondary prevention goal. Although it is still debated whether melanoma screening is effective, Schneider and colleagues¹⁰ very recently showed that the screening might be effective in reducing mortality. Besides early detection, primary prevention and raising public awareness of melanoma are important aims of Euromel-

anoma. The free skin examination attracts much media attention, which is an opportunity to raise awareness on the importance of primary prevention and the need to check suspected skin lesions.

Over the years, as many other campaigns,^{6,8} the campaign consistently attracted more females and young participants than elderly males, although the latter are known to be the group at the highest risk of dying from a melanoma.^{3,11} To increase the focus on this specific group of elderly men, it was decided that the theme for the 2007 Euromelanoma campaign in Belgium would be middle aged and elderly men.

In order to help the Belgian Euromelanoma task-force on focusing on the theme 'Men over age Fifty', a former Belgian Prime minister, J.L. Dehaene, aged 67, offers his torso image associated with the pictures of two of his peers with the announcement 'Have yours looked at instead', to improve the attention on this specific group (Fig. 1).

Upon evaluating the results, the campaign turned out to be very successful in its aim to attract more (elderly) males to the screening day compared to the previous years. The efforts to attract more males resulted in a 20% increase in the proportion of males attending ($p < 0.00001$). In the period 1999–2006, the screenees consisted on an average of 33% males and 67% females, the usual ratio observed in all melanoma screenings.^{6,8} However, in the year 2007, 53% of screenees were males and 47% females (Fig. 2).

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Fig. 1 – Foto poster Belgian Euromelanoma campaign 2007 featuring former Prime minister De Haene stating: ‘Have yours looked at instead’. Pigmented spots can be lethal.

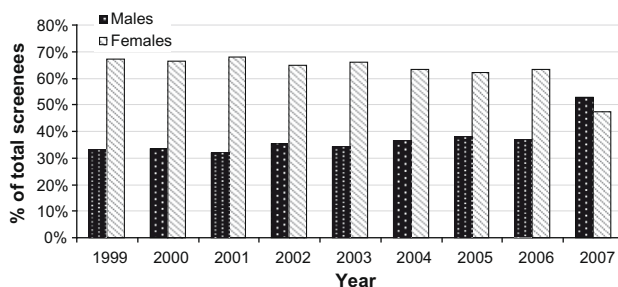


Fig. 2 – Distribution of male and female visitors to the Belgian Euromelanoma day 1999–2007.

Since 1999, the population that came to be screened always included children, even with selective announcements concerning the risk population, which did not include children. Therefore, in 2007, the central call centre that organises

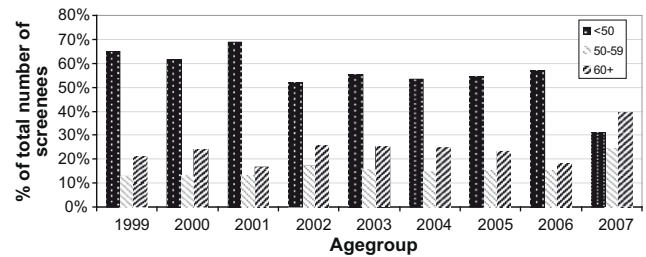


Fig. 3 – Age distribution of male visitors to Euromelanoma in Belgium, 1999–2007.

the appointments for Euromelanoma screenings took extra care to avoid that many children were screened. The mean age of the visitors was studied, and this selective action by the call centres has succeeded by increasing significantly the mean age: the mean age in the years 1999–2006 for those aged >20 was 47.6 years for males and was 44 years for females. This changed to 55 for males and 48.4 for females in 2007; median age for males changed from 42–50 years in 1999–2006 to 57 years in 2007 (Table 1), illustrating that our aim to attract more elderly participants also succeeded. In the years 1999–2006, the proportion of males above 50 was 37%, which increased to 64% in the year 2007 (Fig. 3). The increase was particularly strong for the males aged >60 years, increasing from an average of 23% in the years 1999–2006 to 39% in 2007.

In conclusion, when focusing melanoma screenings on a high-risk population, there is always a concern to try to improve the efficacy of this action, which should be done by targeted messages.^{12,4} We showed that in this specific campaign, a special focus can be given to modulate the population screened into a higher risk population, if special care is taken by combining a clear message and a communicative image for this type of action.

Conflict of interest statement

None declared.

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Table 1 – Age distribution by sex and year, for those aged >20.

	Males aged > 20			Females aged > 20		
	N	Mean age	Median age	N	Mean age	Median age
1999	734	46.7	45	1610	43.2	40
2000	1413	47.6	45	2966	43.8	41
2001	1147	44.9	42	2624	41.2	39
2002	1374	49.7	50	2613	44.0	43
2003	1290	48.7	48	2577	45.0	43
2004	1663	48.2	48	2942	44.9	44
2005	1567	48.1	47	2633	44.9	44
2006	1314	46.0	44	2338	43.4	41
2007	1466	55.0	57	1350	48.4	49

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