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Dying for a tan

Sunday, September 2, 2007

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On Sunday night, you're going to meet a very brave young woman. Her name is Clare Oliver and she is dying. Clare's got skin cancer and she's only got days to live.

But before she goes she wants to warn young people about their deadly obsession with tanning.

Melanoma is now the most common form of cancer among 15 to 30 year-olds. And it's not just on the beaches that young people are putting their lives at risk.

In recent years there's been a boom in solariums. They're all over the place. And they're dangerous, very dangerous.

Your average sunbed blasts out five times more uv radiation than the midday sun. The problem is, the solarium industry is unregulated.

And without proper supervision, many young people, like Clare Oliver, just don't know when to stop - they're literally dying for that killer tan..

Transcript

LIZ HAYES: These are Clare Oliver's last days. At 26, her body has all but shut down.

CLARE OLIVER: Hi, Liz.

LIZ HAYES: Nice to meet you.

CLARE OLIVER: Nice to meet you.

LIZ HAYES: A melanoma diagnosed four years ago is about to claim her life. How you feeling?

CLARE OLIVER: Had a pretty rough day today.

LIZ HAYES: Did you? So, every day it's a struggle?

CLARE OLIVER: Every day - start off the day not being able to breath, just basically sitting in bed with one of these, and just trying to suck in as much air as I can, then next thing you know, I'm vomiting my brains out. Yeah, it's not fun. Yeah — not fun at all, you know.

LIZ HAYES: It's devastating to be with someone who just shouldn't be dying. Clare believes her lust for a tan and time in a solarium contributed to her cancer. It was about the tan, wasn't it?

CLARE OLIVER: Yes.

LIZ HAYES: Which were all guilty of wanting from time to time. What do you say to young people out there who are watching?

CLARE OLIVER: Don't follow the fads. Like, I know it's so easy to, yeah, look at magazines and look at celebrities and look at how beautiful they are, but also look at me — what do you choose? You know? I think I choose life. I choose to be fair. I choose to live my life and walk, you know, to that garden and to travel the world and not, you know, die at the age of 26 because I don't want to.

LIZ HAYES: Melanomas kill more young Australians than any other cancer and the main culprit has always been the sun. Now doctors say it's time the public understood solariums are also dangerous and must share the blame.

DR GRANT MACARTHUR: What is absolutely clear is solarium use is associated with increased rates of skin cancer. There's a 75 percent increase in the rate of melanoma, particularly in young people, that have had solarium use by the age off 35. How



are you doing today, Clare?

LIZ HAYES: Associate Professor Grant MacArthur is Clare's doctor.

CLARE OLIVER: Couldn't breathe this morning.

LIZ HAYES: He's an oncologist and specialist in melanoma. And is there any such thing as a safe dose?

DR GRANT MACARTHUR: That is not clear. However, it is clear that UV radiation from solariums can mutate cells and, personally, I wouldn't go near one.

LIZ HAYES: You would never?

DR GRANT MACARTHUR: I would not.

LIZ HAYES: It's noisy and it's hot. I can literally feel the heat just by touching it and the light is piercing. When you use one of these, you literally toast your body on both sides at once, but for those who love a tan, it's convenient. In a solarium, the sun never goes down. All it takes is a few minutes every couple of days, but perhaps that's because the rays in here are five times more powerful than the midday sun and we all know how lethal the sun can be. Alright, can I have a look?

SAFFRON STYLES: Sure.

LIZ HAYES: Oh, that's a large scar, isn't it?

SAFFRON STYLES: This is basically after the initial mole was removed.

LIZ HAYES: At just 30, Saffron Styles had a melanoma cut from the back of her leg earlier this year. She, too, spent many hours on a sunbed. How often would you use a solarium?

SAFFRON STYLES: I was probably using a solarium one to two times a week.

LIZ HAYES: And what role do you think solariums have played in that melanoma?

SAFFRON STYLES: Well, I certainly think they can't be ruled out. That was something I did fairly consistently for 10 years.

LIZ HAYES: It's been a traumatic experience and it's far from over.

DOCTOR: All the moles on the back of your legs look fine. Every three months for the next five years, she must be examined to be sure the cancer hasn't returned.

SAFFRON STYLES: I'm clear now, but I have a high chance of it recurring. Not necessarily in the same place - it could come be somewhere else.

LIZ HAYES: That must frighten you?

SAFFRON STYLES: It's quite scary.

ANNA BURGESS: A baked chicken — like you're on a spit, but you're lying down. You're taking all these rays — it's like you're a baked chicken.

LIZ HAYES: And you could feel yourself cooking.

ANNA BURGESS: Cooking — literally cooking, the tingle on your skin and you've got the oil, just like a chicken. That's it there.

LIZ HAYES: The story is the same, only the name has changed. Twenty-six-year-old model and dancer Anna Burgess used to tan in a solarium as often as twice a week but a diagnosis of skin cancer put a stop to that.

ANNA BURGESS: I was embarrassed and I was scared, but I was embarrassed, too, because I couldn't really talk about openly — well, I could — but it was my fault. How embarrassing is that?

LIZ HAYES: You have no doubt that your time in the solarium was a major contributor, if not the contributor to your skin cancer?

ANNA BURGESS: I have no doubt that, yep, The main reason I had skin cancer was because of my use of solariums.

LIZ HAYES: No doubt at all?

ANNA BURGESS: No doubt. You don't see me, sort of, sunbaking like this any more.

LIZ HAYES: Anna now realises how lucky she was. She still loves going to the beach, but always with a hat and sunglasses and she's more than happy to let her tan fade. Oh, look at that tan.

ANNA BURGESS: Oh, wow! Now that's not sexy. I don't know about you...

LIZ HAYES: See, now — that's the bronzed Aussie.

ANNA BURGESS: Yeah, there we have it. I think there still is that stigma out there that brown is cool, especially in our age group. It makes you look slimmer and makes you look healthier, sexy. My boyfriend loves it when I'm brown — uh! I say 'pfft' if he says that.

LIZ HAYES: In Australia, the solarium business is booming and the number of salons has increased by 300 percent in the last decade.

ARISTA: Hi, Shirley. How are you?

SHIRLEY: Good morning, Arista. How are you?

ARISTA: Good! How are you?

LIZ HAYES: And, everyday, thousands of young men and women take their chances and subject their bodies to its powerful rays. I guess this is something you enjoy. It's the replication of the sun for you?

ARISTA: Well, I don't get the chance to sit out and sunbake, so when I've got an event on or an occasion, I will come once a fortnight or something like that just to get a glow, yeah.

LIZ HAYES: Twenty-six-year-old Arista says she knows the risks of solarium use but that hasn't stopped her tanning this way for the past seven years. Do you use any sun-protection product in the solarium?

ARISTA: I do cover my freckles with sunscreen SPF 30 or 50.

LIZ HAYES: Before you go in the solarium?

ARISTA: Ah, yeah, with my freckles, definitely, and I get them checked at least twice a year as well.

LIZ HAYES: What is it that you love about having a tan?

ARISTA: I guess it makes me feel healthier, having a bit of a bronzed glow.

LIZ HAYES: And that is the problem. To many, a tan is considered the epitome of good health. Clearly, it isn't.

CLARE OLIVER: Yes, we need to have young people know that solariums are dangerous. I was a 22-year-old, just graduated from uni and just got into the workforce and, yeah, it was all great, and then, suddenly, my world came crashing down.

LIZ HAYES: Clare Oliver only visited a solarium 10 times back when she was a teenager. But she thinks those tanning sessions did the damage.

CLARE OLIVER: I was young and I stupidly chose to make the wrong choice.

LIZ HAYES: But do you think you were properly informed particularly when it came to solariums?

CLARE OLIVER: No, not at that time.

LIZ HAYES: These are not sunbeds in people's minds — these are death beds.

SCOTT MENEILLY: Yeah, that's exactly what people say, yeah.

LIZ HAYES: You would refute that, of course?

SCOTT MENEILLY: Absolutely — yeah, absolutely.

LIZ HAYES: Scott Meneilly is CEO of Body Bronze, Victoria's biggest solarium franchise. He maintains sunbeds are a smart way to get a tan. You, the fair-haired child you are, would be happy to use one of these?

SCOTT MENEILLY: I do. I do, yeah - absolutely. There is no way that you can pinpoint a solarium as being the cause of cancer. You can't - unless it's the only UV exposure you're getting.

LIZ HAYES: The Australasian College of Dermatology says there's no such thing as a safe tan. What would you say?

SCOTT MENEILLY: I would disagree.

LIZ HAYES: They're wrong and you're right?

SCOTT MENEILLY: Because of all the research that I have done looking into other reports ...

LIZ HAYES: But, Scott ...

SCOTT MENEILLY: There's numerous reports.

LIZ HAYES: These are dermatologists. These are people trained to make these judgments. With the greatest respect, you're not.

SCOTT MENEILLY: Absolutely, I'm not, and I don't claim to be.

LIZ HAYES: But, yet, you disagree.

SCOTT MENEILLY: Absolutely, because for every negative report that you can show me on skin cancer, I will find you a positive report, and that is the way of science.

LIZ HAYES: There is a direct link between solariums and skin cancer?

DR GRANT MACARTHUR: There is indeed. All the major studies have been analysed and the conclusions are clear.

LIZ HAYES: Because the solarium industry would have wanted us to believe that there is no link.

DR GRANT MACARTHUR: I would disagree with the solarium industry. I would also say just that it is clear tobacco has cancer-causing substances in it, UV radiation from solariums mutates cells — that is clear.

LIZ HAYES: Bottom line is you have a lethal weapon in your possession.

SCOTT MENEILLY: Yes.

LIZ HAYES: And you have a duty of care.

SCOTT MENEILLY: We do.

LIZ HAYES: And it would appear that there is reason to believe that not everybody has been respecting that duty of care.

SCOTT MENEILLY: Then that is something that the professional tanning salons and the salons that run their businesses properly need assistance with.

LIZ HAYES: You agree it's time for regulation.

SCOTT MENEILLY: It was time a long time ago.

LIZ HAYES: And now because of the bravery of one girl, that regulation is finally happening.

CLARE OLIVER: When I started this journey of awareness, I didn't realise the impact that it would have.

LIZ HAYES: A week ago after Clare's first went public, both the Federal and Victorian governments promised to crackdown on the solarium industry. Clare changed the law — are you astounded by that?

DR GRANT MACARTHUR: I was very surprised. This is just remarkable. Clare has touched people's hearts with predicament. We have had campaigns in the past and they have not been successful. I think it's clear Clare is a far more effective communicator on this than people like me.

LIZ HAYES: We all know the dangers of the sun but the message about those same destructive rays duplicated in solariums is not being understood.

CLARE OLIVER: A few days ago, a doctor told me I only had a few more days and I don't like hearing that I've only for a few

more days because I feel like I've got so much more life. For every day I pass and I haven't passed, I think it's such a bonus but it's so scary.

LIZ HAYES: For me, seeing a beautiful 26-year-old so bravely facing up to death is impossibly sad but, by telling her story, Clare Oliver hopes she can warn others about the dangers of dying for a tan.

CLARE OLIVER: I wanted to go outside just yesterday. I wanted to paint — I love painting — and then the oxygen tank ran out and I had to come back to my room, and I wasn't finished. I couldn't breathe independently. You know, that's part and parcel with melanoma. It's not just about the skin — it's about a lot of things.

LIZ HAYES: You break my heart. I guess the important thing is for this not to be in vain.

CLARE OLIVER: Yes, and this is exactly why I want the message out there. I don't want my death to be in vain. I want the message out there.

LIZ HAYES: Sorry. I'm so sorry.

CLARE OLIVER: Don't be sorry. Yeah.

- The Clare Oliver Melanoma Fund has been established to honour the courage and bravery of Clare Oliver, who is seriously ill with melanoma.
- One hundred percent of proceeds from the fund will be directed to The Melanoma Research Project, a research collaboration between the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, the Alfred Hospital and the Austin Hospital.
- The Melanoma Research Project aims to increase the knowledge about melanoma by combining medical and laboratory research, in order to find better treatments for the melanoma patients.

To donate to the Clare Oliver Melanoma Fund:

- Visit any Commonwealth Bank branch in Australia.
- Visit the website: www.clareolivermelanomafund.org.
- Or Telephone 1800 111 440 (during business hours).

Donations to the Clare Oliver Melanoma Fund are fully tax deductible.