

Monday, 8 November 2010

Springboks screened for skin cancer

Johannesburg – Members of the Springbok squad and their management team were screened for skin cancer, in support of Rob Louw's melanoma awareness campaign, before departing on their historic Grand Slam Tour.

Dr Dagmar Whitaker, the president of The South African Melanoma Advisory Board and Specialist Dermatologist, Dr. Hetesh Pitamber, screened and advised the Springbok squad on the condition of their skins. Dr. Whitaker said South Africa has one of the highest incidences, if not the highest, of malignant melanoma in the world and that sun damage to South Africans occurs at an early age.

Former Springbok looseforward, Rob Louw, became a passionate spokesperson for sun protection following treatment for an aggressive form of melanoma late in 2009.

"Like many other South Africans, I thought I was bullet-proof and that skin cancer would never happen to me," said Louw. "I still live an active outdoor life, but I apply Factor 50 sunscreen every morning, and wear a hat and sunglasses whenever possible. Parents really need to become aware of the dangers, because much of the damage to our skins tends to happen at school level, when children participate in outdoors' activities without protection."

Dr Whitaker said that South Africans needed to change their behaviour and become more sun safe. She told the Springboks that people can continue to enjoy an active outdoor lifestyle and still protect themselves from contracting skin cancer.

"We just need to adapt our behaviour," she said. "It's about enjoying the sun, but doing so responsibly. We hope with the help of sportspeople like the Springboks, we will be able to show people how to be 'sun safe'."

She said she would like to see the Springboks become role models for South Africa's children so that they can see even a Springbok needs to take care of his skin and use sunscreen.

Dr. Whitaker said we should intensify our education about sun safety. "We have to talk about it until the message sinks in," she says. "It's the same as talking about safe sex. Each generation should hear this message over and over until we see a change in behaviour".

The SA Melanoma Advisory Board with the support of Vichy a Skin Health Brand is on a drive to screen South Africa's sports teams for skin cancer and to educate them and the general public about the importance of using sunscreen. "This is an important educational drive we've undertaken with the help of Vichy", she said as the Springboks each left the screening room with a handful of Vichy products. "Products such as these have the right sun protection factor and are easy to use even if you are playing a sport like rugby" commented Dr. Whitaker.

The Medical Relations Manager for Vichy, Efthimia Tzetzis, said, "On Behalf of VICHY and the SAMAB we would like to thank the SPRINGBOKS for taking part in this important Sun Safe Behaviour Campaign. We wish the Springboks best of luck on their historic Grand Slam Tour and we look forward to them bringing back the Gold."

The Springboks made a R10 000 donation to support the work of the South African Melanoma Advisory Board, which is a multi-disciplinary forum with representation from all the disciplines involved in managing a malignant melanoma – dermatologists, oncologists, pathologists and plastic surgeons.

In 2010, Vichy is proud to develop its educational mission by forming a unique partnership with the South African Melanoma Advisory Board.

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