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Letter

News reports: update on buying indoor uv tanning with university debit cards

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Abstract

Background & Objective: Indoor tanning by adults under 35 years of age increases the risk of developing melanoma 59% to 75%. Cost is a major barrier limiting young adults from purchasing indoor tanning services. Our recent study by Boyers et al determined that 18 of 96 major universities, all in the eastern and southern United States, had university-sponsored debit cards with indoor tanning affiliations. These debit cards, which conveniently link with student identification (ID) cards, help with student living expenses and are often loaded with money by parents. By creating agreements with indoor tanning salon vendors, universities are endorsing a World Health Organization class I carcinogen. To expand the results of our previous study, we broadened our search to further assess universities in the western United States as well as Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

Methods: Using www.collegeboard.edu, we identified the 4 largest residential colleges in Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. Additionally, we investigated the top international universities, utilizing www.topuniversities.com. Internet searches, phone calls, and email correspondence were used to determine if an institution had a student ID-linked debit card. Universities with affiliations to bank debit cards and cards that could only be used on campus were excluded.

Results: In the western United States, indoor tanning merchants were affiliated with University of Arizona, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University: Prescott Campus, and the University of Denver student debit cards. Of the original 18 schools with affiliations according to the Boyers et al study, 2 universities no longer have agreements and 5 created agreements with additional tanning salons.

Of 45 universities examined in our international search, no debit cards were discovered for off-campus purchases. Therefore, the concerning issue of university associations with tanning salons appears to be solely a domestic problem.

Conclusions: Our findings indicate that the formation of financial agreements between universities and tanning salons is an ever-present and growing problem in the United States. Since Boyers et al, we have engaged in outreach efforts with alumni, faculty, administration, and local university cancer centers to terminate university ties with tanning salon vendors. Further advocacy efforts are critical to combat this dangerous association, reduce the frequency of skin cancer, and protect the health of young adults.

Keywords: University, tanning, debit card, student

Letter to the editor

Despite growing evidence of the harm of UV radiation, nearly 10% of the population uses indoor tanning services, with greatest use in young white women [1,2]. Indoor tanning by adults under 35 years of age increases the risk of developing melanoma by 59 to 75% [1]. Cost is a major barrier limiting young adults from purchasing indoor tanning services [3]. Our recent study by Boyers et al determined that 18 of 96 major universities, all in the eastern and southern United States, had university-sponsored debit cards with indoor tanning affiliations [4]. These debit cards, which conveniently link with student identification (ID) cards, help with student living expenses and are often loaded with money by parents. By creating agreements with indoor tanning salon vendors, universities are endorsing a World Health Organization class I carcinogen [5].

To expand the results of our previous study, we broadened our search to further assess universities in the western United States as well as Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Using www.collegeboard.edu, we identified the top four largest residential colleges in Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. Additionally, we investigated the top international universities, utilizing www.topuniversities.com. Internet searches, phone calls, and email correspondence were used to determine if an institution had a student identification (ID)-linked debit card. Universities with affiliations to bank debit cards and cards that could only be used on campus were excluded. This study was reviewed and approved by the Colorado Multiple Institutional Review Board (Protocol 13-3232).

In the western United States, indoor tanning merchants were affiliated with University of Arizona, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University: Prescott Campus, and the University of Denver student debit cards. Tanning salon affiliations with the University of Arizona were new since Boyer et al's original study. This newly discovered agreement prompted us to further reassess the universities investigated in Boyer et al's study. Of the original 18 schools, two no longer have agreements with tanning salons. Unfortunately, five of the 18 schools have created agreements with additional tanning salons.

Of 45 universities examined in our international search, no debit cards were discovered for off-campus purchases. Many universities allowed for prepaid cards or student IDs to be used for on-campus purchases. None of these on-campus vendors included tanning salons. Lack of tanning salon affiliations largely reflects the absence of university-debit cards available for off-campus purchases. Therefore, the concerning issue of university associations with tanning salons appears to be solely a domestic problem.

Our findings indicate that the formation of financial agreements between universities and tanning salons is an ever-present and growing problem in the United States. Since Boyers et al, we have engaged in outreach efforts with alumni, faculty, administration, and local university cancer centers to terminate university ties with tanning salon vendors. Further advocacy efforts are critical to combat this dangerous association, reduce the frequency of skin cancer, and protect the health of young adults.

Table 1. University Debit Cards Associated with Tanning Salon Merchants

State	University	Total undergraduates	Number of tanning salon merchants 2013	Number tanning salon merchants 2014
Alabama	University of Alabama	28,026	1	1
Arizona	University of Arizona	31,399	0	1
	Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University: Prescott Campus	1,802	N/A	2
Colorado	University of Denver	5,504	N/A	1
Georgia	University of Georgia	26,259	2	3
	Georgia Southern University	17,993	2	1
Illinois	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	32,281	2	0
Indiana	Indiana University	32,371	2	2
Kentucky	Western Kentucky University	18,101	1	1
Michigan	Michigan State University	37,454	3	4
Mississippi	The University of Mississippi	16,060	3	3
New Hampshire	University of New Hampshire	12,811	1	1
	Southern New Hampshire University	11,253	1	2
New Jersey	Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey: New Brunswick/Piscataway Campus	31,593	4	0

Ohio	Ohio State University: Columbus Campus	14,432	3	4
Pennsylvania	Penn State University Park	39,193	8	4
	University of Pittsburgh	18,429	1	1
South Carolina	Clemson University	16,562	2	2
Texas	University of Texas at Austin	39,995	1	1
Vermont	University of Vermont	11,211	1	5
Virginia	Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	23,859	2	1

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