



Dermatological Society of Malaysia **Persatuan Dermatologi Malaysia (PDM)**

KULIT – Living with Psoriasis PDM Campaign 2007

(Article 1 – Introduction of Campaign)

Psoriasis – The Misunderstood Skin Disease

The skin, being on the outside, is what people see first. This is the premise underlying the slew of beauty ads that bombard us daily, but perhaps it is time for some perspective. After all, people don't recoil in horror from wrinkles.

Psoriasis, on the other hand, can cause people to point, stare in disgust, avert their eyes. People avoid coming into contact with a person with psoriasis, for fear of catching it.

However, psoriasis is not contagious, and this is one of the key messages we need to convey to the public so that the stigma and fear of psoriasis are removed.

Psoriasis is an inheritable condition that results in localised or extensive inflamed scaly skin lesions that can affect any part of the skin. It frequently occurs on the scalp, and the outer aspects of the elbows, knees and shins. In a person with psoriasis, the skin immune system is altered and certain activated white cells (T-cells) speed up the growth cycle of skin cells; instead of shedding, the cells pile up and form thickened scales on the skin surface. Approximately 10 to 30 percent of people with psoriasis will also develop psoriatic arthritis. This affects the joints of the fingers and toes and may involve the neck, lower back, knees and ankles. In severe cases, psoriatic arthritis can be disabling and cause irreversible damage to joints.

This month, Persatuan Dermatologi Malaysia begins a six-month campaign – *KULIT: Living With Psoriasis* – to raise awareness among the general public of psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis. One of the campaign's goals is to help end the stigma.

The campaign aims to educate everyone who may be involved with psoriasis – patients, their families, the medical fraternity, the media, and the public.

Getting the message across

Psoriasis is a lifelong disease that affects about 2-3 percent of Malaysians (similar to worldwide figures). Dr Allan K C Yee, President of Persatuan Dermatologi Malaysia states that at least 4-5 percent of all skin outpatient attendance is for psoriasis (based on surveys done in Universiti Hospital and a personal series in two private hospitals in the Klang Valley).

According to Dr Yee, psoriasis is often misdiagnosed by patients, pharmacists and doctors as dandruff, ringworm or eczema. The campaign hopes to raise awareness among general practitioners; GPs are almost always the first (and sometimes only) point of contact for sufferers of skin ailments.



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The campaign comprises six community messages in mainstream media and one public forum. Each message will cover various aspects: the campaign, different types of psoriasis, emotional challenges, treatments and support groups.

Because the community messages are limited in space, there will also be articles (this one being the first) expanding on the community messages. The public will be urged to act: visit the PDM website (www.dermatology.org.my) for info; refer to the website's list of hospitals and clinics for testing; get tested; attend the planned public forum to hear firsthand from psoriasis experts about this misunderstood disease.

A multi-layered KULIT

One of the PDM's concerns is that even those who have been correctly diagnosed often live without adequate knowledge of the condition. The Campaign's name was chosen "because we want people to understand and remember the main aspects of successfully living with psoriasis," Dr Yee explained.

Each letter of the word "KULIT" relates to a specific aspect of the disease.

Knowledge is essential. Although there is no cure, people with psoriasis who understand the nature of the disease can live a normal life, and avoid the well-known trigger factors that aggravate or bring on psoriasis. Knowledge is power – power to change one's life for the better. Websites like www.psoriasis.org and www.dermatology.org.my are useful sources of knowledge.

U is shorthand for **you**, the individual. As with all serious skin-related disorders, there is an inner dimension to psoriasis that needs to be addressed. The emotional health of the individual patient can not only improve quality of life, but also encourage greater public understanding. Stress aggravates psoriasis; our attitude to psoriasis can create more stress that perpetuates psoriasis. Conversely and fortunately, proper stress management can greatly help to alleviate psoriasis.

L is for living with psoriasis and coping with a major skin disease with or without arthritis. Not many of us are aware of the day-to-day challenges facing a psoriasis patient.

Interaction with others – be it with family members, fellow workers, physicians, support groups like Psoriasis Association of Selangor & FT – is very important.

Treatment of psoriasis varies from person to person. "Although general principles apply, the treatment programme must be tailor-made for the individual patient, depending on the extent of the disease, social circumstances, and underlying or associated diseases," Dr Yee explained. This takes time and patients are encouraged to work with their dermatologist. Patients should keep abreast of newer treatments such as topical vitamin D agents, and biologics – these provide patients with safer and effective treatment options.



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Psoriasis affects 2-3 percent of Malaysians. This is the first of a six-part series from PDM's "KULIT – Living with Psoriasis" Campaign 2007. For more on psoriasis, treatment options and KULIT, visit www.dermatology.org.my or email kulitcampaign@yahoo.com. This article is a guide to help you better understand psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis. Consult a suitably qualified medical practitioner before acting on any information contained above. KULIT is a community programme sponsored by Wyeth Malaysia.