

# SUN PROTECTION: ANOTHER VOICE FILTERS THROUGH

AS I WAS REVIEWING my submissions for “The Sunscreen Filter,” it occurred to me that the columns I have written deal with issues that are quite relevant but not

necessarily complete in scope. I have written a lot about regulations and consumer issues as they relate to sunscreens—topics such as the safety of sunscreen products and the environmental issues in the field of sun care, tanning salons and protection. My column thus far has presented an informed, insider’s perspective. A more comprehensive treatment of the issues would move beyond the industry’s borders to explore its interaction with the sunscreen user. What is the view from the outside, look-

ing in? Consumers are vital to the implementation of our sun care offerings; they are living in the sun, damaged by the sun’s rays, they tangibly require adequate protection and are most immediately affected by the safety of their sunscreen products. For our industry to become responsive to the needs of its target audience, we need to incorporate the consumer’s perspective. It is not sufficient to address the public in layman’s terms; we must also listen. To that end, for this column, I have sought the input of a concerned, informed, non-scientist consumer.

Mike Frankenfield is an experienced English teacher who, along with my daughter Mona, has been editing my writing for this column. I trust that my readers will appreciate his perspective in view of the fact that Mike was diagnosed with skin cancer and has had the cancer successfully removed. He and others we all know are the faces behind the unbelievable statistic that almost 1.3 million new cases of skin cancer are detected each year in the U.S. His contribution to this column helps to put a human face on the sun care debate.

In a conversation more regularly occurring between industry professionals, here, another voice filters through:

“It is late evening, and I find myself in a familiar position—the La-Z Boy recliner in my living room with my computer on my lap. Often times I am grading papers, reading e-mails or doing some research for an upcoming class or project. Tonight, however, I find myself in an unfamiliar position—trying to complete an assignment. The teacher is now the student, and it takes me back many years to a time when this assignment would have been done on an electric typewriter with whiteout tape right by my side. I can’t believe there was a time in my teaching career when I actually resisted this new technology.

For the past several months, I have worked behind the scenes with Dr.

Shaath as he wrote his columns for HAPPI magazine. At his urging, I made suggestions to make his columns more entertaining and more readable for the ‘non-scientist.’

As an educator and an English teacher by trade, it gave me an opportunity to work closely with a professional writer, a highly educated scientist, and an adult who was willing to entertain and, oftentimes, utilize my suggestions to make his column read more like *Golf Digest* and less like the chemistry tests I avoided throughout my academic career. When it comes to science, I am definitely a ‘purist.’ Very little science has entered my brain the



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**Putting a human face on the sun care debate. Mike Frankenfield—an English teacher and copy editor for Nadim Shaath—provides his perspective on the issue at hand in this month’s installment of *The Sunscreen Filter*.**

first half century of my life.

During the course of these past several months, we have exchanged a number of e-mails. The columns were always part of our early communications, but over time we also learned a little bit more about each other and our families. Dr. Shaath and I share a common passion—golf—an activity that provides me with fresh air, exercise and sun. While I have provided minimal editorial assistance to Dr.

prematurely, wrinkled our faces and hands, and gave us skin cancer. The ‘lucky’ ones got basal cell carcinoma and the ‘unlucky’ ones encountered the bluish black pigmentation of melanoma.

Meanwhile, our hair thinned and turned gray, our chests moved south and collided with our stomachs, and it seemed a lot smarter to keep our shirts on and cover our wrinkled faces and necks and ears with sunscreen—at

tist and an outsider to the cosmetics industry, it’s difficult for me to be critical of sunscreen manufacturers and their products. Part of me is from the school of thought that asks, ‘If it isn’t broken, why fix it? Do we need a new one?’ My assumption, of course, is that the products I now use are safe and effective. Past columns have discussed new ingredients awaiting FDA approval, nanotechnology, and the use of natural ingredients in sunscreens. Even an old-timer like me would welcome any product innovation that contains “natural ingredients” as compared to the products that contain ingredients ending in ‘ate,’ and ‘one.’

Dr. Shaath expressed some concern in his February 2008 column when he wrote, ‘The proposed labeling may be confusing to the consumer.’ Trust me—the new labeling can’t be any more confusing than the old labeling when it comes to ingredients. The main considerations would include the efficacy and safety of new ingredients that will, in time, be approved.

There is one aspect to the past columns that I cannot remain impassive about—tanning salons. I am fortunate in that I don’t make my living selling tanning beds. I cannot, however, endorse the use of tanning beds as having any kind of health benefit. This, too, hits close to home. I have two wonderful college-aged daughters; the older daughter is a former lifeguard at our community pool who tans frequently throughout the year in our northern climate, and a fair-skinned daughter who burns after just a few minutes in the sun as evidenced by a recent run with her mother. It is hard for me and my wife not to lecture loud and often to both of them about the need for sunscreen and our opposition to any kind of tanning bed. Even the fair-skinned lass opted for a tanning bed prior to prom knowing that it was going to be risky.

In my eyes, the tanning industry should have the same type of controls as the tobacco and alcohol industries. No minor under the age of 18 should be allowed to tan in a tanning salon. We have no trouble keeping minors from cigarettes and alcohol because of the health risks involved. No lobbyist from the tanning salon industry is

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Shaath these past few months, I have become an avid reader of his columns. We have had some lively on-line debates over the topics in his columns, the U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA), and the cosmetics industry. Somewhere in the editing process I became part of the ongoing discussion and debate about sunscreens for the most personal reason—I’ve already had skin cancer removed from my back. My father has had skin cancer. My friend and colleague, Keith, has had skin cancer removed from his face, and the scars remain as a visible reminder of what the sun’s rays can do to a person’s unprotected skin.

My generation ran around barefoot and bare-chested at the beach, slathered in Coppertone tanning oil, intentionally getting burned. Eventually, the burn turned to brown, and we looked and felt great in our shorts and Ray-Bans with our bronze backs and chests, our hair flowing long and graceful behind us. We worshiped the sun, and in time it aged our skin

least SPF 30—before we played golf, before we got into the boat or onto the bike, or before we headed to the beach.

We’re not statistics; we’re real people with kids and jobs and scars. No pun intended.

As I’ve read through Dr. Shaath’s columns numerous times, some key themes have gotten my attention—the role of the FDA in the industry, the limitations for product innovation within the sunscreen industry, the struggle over what is an acceptable testing procedure within the industry, the tanning salon industry, the safety of sunscreen products, the debate over labeling of sunscreen products, and the reality that the consumer is the one that suffers throughout, mostly in ignorance of what is actually occurring within the industry.

I’m in no position to pass judgment on how testing should be done by the FDA, but I do believe that I can express an opinion that whatever they need to do needs to be done within a reasonable time frame. As a non-scientist

going to convince me or many others that exposure from a tanning bed doesn't have potentially harmful effects—that it can be hazardous to one's health both short-term and certainly long-term. Even I believed the dermatologist when she told me that the initial damage to my skin began when I was a child and continued in earnest through my teenage years.

Knowing that, it's difficult not to want to protect my own children from a similar fate, especially when it's compro-

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mised by a tanning salon industry that sings the sirens' song to those young women—my daughters—I'm trying to protect.

Finally, it is up to those outside the tanning industry to 'teach our children well.' Educating ourselves about skin cancer and its prevention is also part of our responsibility as adults and educators. Being a good role model is part of the responsibility; if I want my own children to wear sunscreen, it is imperative that I set a good example and wear it whenever I go outside for recreational activities. I carry a big tube of sunscreen during the golf season for my high school golfers—another fair-skinned group—and make them apply it early before we hit the course for an event. Not only does it protect their skin from painful sunburn and a tough night of sleep, it is a good habit to establish with them as they head into adulthood. It certainly helps if the sunscreen product says 'sport' somewhere on the label.

I am convinced that FDA will issue its Final Rule, new ingredients will make sunscreens more effective, a variety of products will provide more options for consumers, and current, valid facts and information will eventually outweigh the misinformation that confuses many consumers. The good news is that the debate is alive and well; it's a good sign that the industry is listening, and it's an even better sign that the consumer has no qualms about voicing concerns. In a perfect world, both sides will feel that they have won, and skin cancer will be the ultimate loser.” ●