



American College of Mohs Surgery

*Fellowship trained skin cancer
and reconstructive surgeons*

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Gary C. Kelly, CEO
Southwest Airlines Co.
2702 Love Field Drive
Dallas, TX 75235

Dear Mr. Kelly,

We are disappointed to learn that Southwest Airlines recently aired a television commercial about a woman traveling to her high school reunion that implies tanned skin is desirable.

In observing some of the responses to the July 8 posting of the commercial on Southwest's Facebook page, it appears that we aren't the only ones forced to question why a company that places a premium on the safety and well-being of its customers would propagate such an irresponsible message.

User Donna Regan commented in part that "No tan is safe and can actually cause skin cancer, including deadly melanoma." Donna is right, but what you might not know is why she's so certain: her daughter, Jaime, lost her life to melanoma after tanning frequently in her teens.

In 2009, the World Health Organization classified indoor tanning devices as Class I human carcinogens on the basis of strong evidence linking indoor tanning to increased risk of skin cancer. A 2014 analysis estimated that more than 400,000 cases of skin cancer may be related to indoor tanning in the U.S. each year: 245,000 basal cell carcinomas (BCC), 168,000 squamous cell carcinomas (SCC), and 6,000 melanomas.

Indoor tanning was found to increase risk of BCC by 29% and of SCC by 67%. Studies have found that indoor tanning exposes users to excessive levels of UV radiation. The average intensity of artificial UV radiation corresponded to a UV Index of 13 or 14 (extreme), with some devices measuring even higher. Some studies have found that tanning devices may expose users to 4–13 times the amount of UVA as exposure from summer noontime sun in the District of Columbia, depending on the type of device used.

Despite these figures, more than 1 in 3 young white women like the one in your ad engage in indoor tanning each year. Since we firmly believe that education about the dangers of UV ray exposure—a proven cause of skin cancer—can prevent behaviors that lead to damaged skin, here are some skin cancer facts:

- One in three cancers diagnosed worldwide is a skin cancer, 80 to 90 percent of which are caused by UV rays, according to the Canadian Skin Cancer Foundation.
- One in five people is expected to develop some kind of skin cancer in his or her lifetime.

- Both basal and squamous cell skin cancers tend to be found on UV-exposed areas, and incidence is tied to lifetime exposure. Melanoma, more deadly but less prevalent, is also tied to intense UV exposure.
- A person's risk for melanoma doubles if he or she has had more than five sunburns.

Excessive UV exposure can also lead to wrinkles, spots, premature skin aging and other forms of sun-damaged skin, none of which the onlookers depicted in your ad would have found impressive.

As a leading airline carrier responsible for delivering millions of people to sunny travel destinations each year, we think Southwest is in a unique position to encourage sun safety and awareness. We strongly urge the discontinuation of this misinformed and misleading advertisement, and for Southwest to consider ways it can share messaging that advocates sun safety.

As the preeminent specialty society representing more than 1,300 fellowship trained skin cancer and reconstructive surgeons, the American College of Mohs Surgery would welcome the opportunity to engage with Southwest in developing such messaging. Please feel free to contact us if we can provide any further educational information or be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JGA', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John G. Albertini, MD, FACMS
President, American College of Mohs Surgery