

Brief interview with PD Dr. Sonja Molin

“They simply wait too long”

3 questions to PD Dr. med. Sonja Christine Molin, Chief Physician at the Clinic and Polyclinic for Dermatology and Allergology of the Ludwig-Maximilians-University, Munich, Germany.

Initially harmless skin irritations can become chronic rather quickly – what is missed to be done?

Sonja Molin: In general, employees wait too long before they consult a dermatologist or company physician. In the beginning, there may be a cortisone cream that helps. During the holidays, the disorders get better, and so there is no reason anymore to seek help. But when skin irritations become better during leisure time, it is a clear indication of an occupational disease. Particularly people working in nursing or medical professions take care of their skin problems too late. This has a lot to do with social responsibility: patients always come first. Moreover, there is a lack of education. Many nurses think that skin irritations simply are part of the job. Many of them are not aware of the fact that skin problems that seem to be harmless in the beginning may force them to give up their profession.

Are there differences in terms of gender and occupational group?

Sonja Molin: Patient care still is female dominated, hence, women are more affected. But women are easier to motivate to perform basic skin care than men, which is an advantage. Wet work, the main trigger of skin problems is more commonly associated with nursing than medical professions. An exception are surgeons and dentists: due to the frequent use of gloves they are disproportionately affected by skin irritations.



When the reason of a skin disease lies in the occupation the “dermatologist's procedure” takes effect. Why is it used so little, and what can facilitate the return to work?

Sonja Molin: Many patients fear that a “dermatologist's procedure” has a negative effect on their job. Much explanation is required. Often, these fears do not prove founded. Most clinics want to keep their employees for the long term. In my experience, most clinics fulfil the legal requirements such as hazard identification, skin protection plans with corresponding preparations, training, etc. So, the positive attitude towards skin health prevails. In addition, for the duration of the “dermatologist's procedure”, the professional associations bear the costs for the targeted individual prophylactic measures. Hence, the clinic management does not suffer any financial loss. On the contrary: thanks to the “dermatologist's procedure” the chances that the staff member can continue to work in her/his profession are very good. However, in general, I have the impression that even more information and education is needed to overcome the prejudices.