

University links with Channel 4 to create first skin database

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The University of Birmingham has teamed up with the Channel 4 health awareness show *Embarrassing Bodies* to create a groundbreaking dermatological database.

Dr June Jones, senior lecturer in biomedical ethics, and medical effects artist Julia Hyland, of the History of Medicine Unit, have collaborated with the makers of the programme to produce a unique image bank of photographs of skin tones submitted by viewers.

The two women also feature in an episode of the latest series of the show, which attempts to raise health awareness and to de-stigmatise 'embarrassing' medical conditions.

Using Julia's artistic skills, they recreate a variety of distinctive skin conditions, including ringworm and melanoma, on progressively darker-skinned volunteers. When asked to identify the conditions, medical students had more difficulty spotting them in people with darker skin tones, which they may not have encountered before and would have been unable to reference without an existing image bank.

According to Dr Jones, less than four per cent of images in dermatology databases are of patients with darker skin.

'Doctors and medical students have little opportunity to learn about how skin conditions present in people with darker skin tones, which means that there can be a delay or a mistake in diagnosis,' she explains.

'The image bank specifically seeks images of skin conditions from people of darker skin tones so that a comparison can be made across a range of conditions, symptoms and skin colours.'

Once the database is complete, Dr Jones will lead a team of web designers and dermatologists to create freely available online learning materials for doctors and medical students to help to aid with accurate diagnosis and treatment plans.

'We really hope that people will visit the show's website and upload their images to the skin database,' she adds. 'Here in the West Midlands we have one of the most ethnically diverse populations so it's really important that we lead the way here and train our doctors to provide equitable health care for all.'

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- www.channel4.com/programmes/embarrassing-bodies (<http://www.channel4.com/programmes/embarrassing-bodies>)