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SURVEY ON SKIN CANCER ARISING IN TATTOOS AS REPORTED IN THE WORLD LITERATURE: INDUCED BY PIGMENT OR COINCIDENTAL?

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The introduction in the dermis of exogenous pigments and dyes to obtain a permanent design (tattooing) represents a unique in-vivo situation, where a large amount of metallic salts and organic dyes remain in the skin for the lifetime of the bearer. The potential local and systemic carcinogenic effects of tattoos and tattoo inks remain unclear. Several studies have shed light on the presence of potential carcinogenic or pro-carcinogenic products in tattoo inks. We extensively reviewed the literature and found approximately 50 cases of skin cancer on tattoos, mainly cases of squamous-cell carcinoma and keratoacanthoma, followed by cases of melanoma and basal-cell carcinoma. The number of skin cancers arising in tattoos is therefore seemingly low, and this association has to be considered thus far as coincidental. We will discuss the “classic” pros and cons argue for a potential carcinogenic risk of tattooing and tattoo inks.