



The dark side of getting a tattoo

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While tattoos appear to have increasingly infiltrated mainstream culture in Australia and the social apprehension behind getting a tattoo has seemingly disappeared, a Perth-based surgeon is reminding people to remain vigilant of the medical risks that still exist.

Dr Alexandra O'Neill today highlighted these risks at the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) Annual Scientific Congress (ASC) in Brisbane, where she profiled a recent case that had been presented to her at the Royal Perth Hospital.

"In this instance the tattoo procedure occurred overseas and both red and black ink was used.

"When the patient came to us there was a significant level of scarring in the red ink portion of the tattoo, and the patient was in quite a level of discomfort," Dr O'Neill said.

Following a series of injections and topical treatments the scarring eventually healed and the patient eventually returned to full health, but Doctor O'Neill urged caution to others considering getting a tattoo.

"This was just one example, but the reality is that as more people are getting tattoos, naturally we are also seeing more people presenting to medical facilities experiencing complications."

"There is a general level of understanding that getting a tattoo might be uncomfortable and accompanied by some immediate or short term pain, but I don't think there is quite the same level of understanding for some of the more long term side effects."

The Department of Health warns of the dangers involved when cosmetic tattooing is not performed correctly, and urges people to make sure the body artist meets strict health and safety requirements.

While Dr O'Neill backed these claims, she also believes that people should consider the general risks that apply to all tattoo procedures.

"There are certainly sensible precautions that can be taken to minimise the level of risk, but as the process of getting a tattoo breaches the skin, there will always be the possibility of allergic reactions, skin infections and various other complications."

"This is not about limiting personal choice in any way. Some people may evaluate these risks and decide that they want to go ahead and get a tattoo anyway."

"But what we are trying to do is to communicate to those people who may not have seriously considered the possible complications that could occur.

"It is important that people are provided with the appropriate level of information that they need, to help them make informed choices," Dr O'Neill said.