

EAR, NOSE AND THROAT ASSOCIATES OF CHESTER COUNTY

Alexander C. Keszeli, D.O. **Alfred J. Mauriello, II, M.D.**
Michael A. Picariello, M.D. **Joseph L. Smith, II, M.D.**
Daniella D. Benson, PA-C
Nicole A. Walstein, PA-C

SKIN CANCER

The skin is the largest organ of the body which provides protection against heat, light and infection. Skin is made up of two major layers as well as various cell types. The epidermis is the top layer of the skin, composed of three types of cells – flat, scaly cells on the surface called squamous cells, round cells called basal cells and melanocytes, which are the cells that provide the skin its color and protect against skin damage. The inner layer of the skin, the dermis, is the layer that contains nerves, blood vessels and sweat glands.

WHAT IS SKIN CANCER?

There are several types of cancer that originate in the skin. The most common type is basal cell carcinoma, which accounts for roughly 70 percent of all skin cancers. Squamous cell carcinoma accounts for 20 percent of all skin cancers. These types are classified as non melanoma skin cancer. Melanoma is the third type, accounting for about 5 percent of all skin cancers, and is potentially much more serious. Other types of skin cancer are rare.

- Basal cell carcinoma usually appears as a small, raised bump, occasionally with a pearly appearance. It is most commonly seen on areas of the skin that have received significant sun exposure. This cancer can extend outward but rarely spreads to other parts of the body.
- Squamous cell carcinoma is also seen in areas that are usually exposed to excessive sun, such as the lower lip, hands, nose and forehead areas. This cancer appears usually as a firm, red bump or ulceration of the skin that does not heal. Squamous cell carcinomas can spread to the regional lymph nodes and to other parts of the body.
- Melanoma, which arises from the melanocytes, usually is a pigmented, colored lesion of the skin with an irregular shape, irregular borders, and multiple colors. However, on rare occasions, melanoma can lack pigment or color. Melanoma can also occur on the moist or mucous membranes of the body. It is the most harmful of all skin cancers and can spread to other places in the body. When identified and treated early, most melanomas have a very high cure rate.

HOW IS SKIN CANCER DIAGNOSED?

Early signs of skin cancer are bumps or nodules that are enlarging, changes in existing moles such as size, texture or color and skin sores that do not heal. If you notice any of the facts listed above, you should see your doctor right away. If you are concerned about a skin lesion, you

should see your physician as soon as possible. Under local anesthesia, a physician may excise all or a portion (biopsy) of the growth. This is then examined under a microscope to obtain a diagnosis.

HOW IS SKIN CANCER TREATED?

The most ordinary and effective method of treating skin cancers is surgical removal or excision. This is usually performed in the office or as an outpatient. The edges are then checked by a pathologist to make sure that all of the cancer has been removed. With larger skin cancers the surgeon may take skin from the region using a flap or from other parts of the body (using a graft) to promote healing. In more advanced cases of skin cancer, radiation and chemotherapy may also be used to improve cure rates.

The physicians of ENTACC are Board-certified otolaryngology and head and neck surgeons who specialize in the diagnosis and surgical treatment of skin cancers, not only of the head and neck but throughout the body. They are expertly trained in the various reconstructive techniques which include grafting and flaps.

RISK AND PREVENTION OF SKIN CANCER

Fair-skinned people, especially those who live in southern climates and have undue exposure to the sun, are at high risk of developing skin cancers. Additionally the presence of many moles, a family history of skin cancer, use of indoor tanning devices, and severe sunburn in childhood increase the risk of developing a skin cancer.

The risk of skin cancer can be greatly minimized by reducing direct sunlight exposure especially between the hours of 10 AM and 2 PM. The use of protective clothing that covers the skin as well as the use of sunscreens is paramount. A Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 15 or more is ideal. These products do not completely block the damaging rays but do minimize the exposure of your skin to these rays.

The recent development of the ultraviolet index provides information as to the potential risk or exposure level for outdoor activities on a given day. This index is used as a national service with an index number that ranges from 0 to 10+. A 0 to 2 index number represents minimal exposure to injurious ultraviolet radiation. An index of 10+ represents very high exposure to ultraviolet radiation.

In addition to avoiding exposure to ultraviolet radiation, the most important thing that a patient can do is to recognize the early signs of skin cancer development. It is best to do a self examination after showering in front of a full-length mirror. Look for moles, birthmarks and blemishes which change in character and be alert to any sore that does not heal or any new nodule or lesion on the skin. If you notice anything unusual, you should see your physician as soon as possible. Detecting and treating skin cancers early can save one's life.