Cutting-edge Mohs surgery keeps scars small when treating skin cancer

Posted by Dr. Jeremy S. Bordeaux, Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine August 13, 2008 10:12AM

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Q. My sister was just diagnosed with skin cancer and we're in the process of learning more about her treatment options. Her surgeon mentioned this procedure called "Mohs." I've never even heard of this before.

A. Mohs micrographic surgery is the most advanced treatment procedure for skin cancer available today. It's an effective and precise method for treating basal cell and squamous cell skin cancers.

The advantage of Mohs surgery

With the Mohs technique, physicians can see beyond the visible disease to precisely identify and remove the entire tumor layer by layer while leaving the surrounding healthy tissue intact and unharmed. As the most exact and precise method for tumor removal, it minimizes the chance of regrowth and lessens the potential for scarring or disfigurement.

When to consider Mohs surgery

Mohs micrographic surgery is primarily used to treat basal and squamous cell carcinomas, but can be used to treat less common tumors including melanoma. Mohs surgery is appropriate when:

• The cancer is growing rapidly or uncontrollably.

• The edges of the cancer cannot be clearly defined.

• The cancer is large.

• Scar tissue exists in the area of the cancer.

• The cancer was treated previously and recurred.

• The cancer is in an area where it is important to preserve healthy tissue for maximum functional and cosmetic result, such as eyelids, nose, ears, lips, fingers, toes and genitals.

• The cancer is in an area where the skin cancer had been. Generally, a defined.

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In addition, the normal healing process involves a period of skin contraction, which often peaks four to six weeks after the surgery. This may appear as a bumpiness or

hardening of the scar. On the face, this change is nearly always temporary and the scar will soften and improve with time.

If you have a history of abnormal scarring, such as hypertrophic scars or keloids, or if there are problems with the healing of your scar, injections or other treatments may be used to optimize the cosmetic result.

**Success rate of Mohs surgery**

Mohs surgery has the highest success rate of all treatments for skin cancer -- up to 99 percent.

The Mohs technique is also the treatment of choice for cancers of the face and other sensitive areas as it relies on the accuracy of a microscopic surgical procedure to trace the edges of the cancer and ensure complete removal of all tumors down to the roots during the initial surgery.

Because the Mohs process features a systematic microscopic search that traces skin cancer down to its roots, it offers the highest chance for complete removal of the tumor while sparing the normal tissue surrounding it.

**Training of Mohs surgeons**

Mohs surgeons are specially trained. They have completed at least one additional year of fellowship training (in addition to the physician's three-year dermatology residency) under the tutelage of a Mohs College member. These physicians are specially trained in surgery, pathology and reconstruction.

**Source:** American College of Mohs Surgery

*Tags: cancer, Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, Mohs Micrographic Surgery, skin cancer, University Hospitals Case Medical Center*