Skin Cancers & Management  
When Surgery Is Not An Option

Please see your health care professional if you experience any health problems.

The most common type of skin cancer seen is a basal cell carcinoma. It arises from the cells at the bottom part of the outer layer of the skin. It is known as the non-melanoma skin cancer and is the most common and least dangerous form of skin cancer. It grows slowly and usually appears on the head, neck and upper torso. Basal cell carcinoma skin cancers tend to occur in sun exposed areas in susceptible skin types, particularly those with Celtic heritage. Ideally your Local Medical Officer will be able to remove the skin lesion by cutting it out or in some cases freezing it off with ‘dry ice’.

There are many types of treating options available for basal cell carcinoma however as you age other conditions may influence your ability to have surgery for basal cell carcinoma skin cancer. It is most important that your health care professional can select a dressing that will manage bacterial load, soak up the ooze and be comfortable and inexpensive.

If correct care of the lesion is not undertaken there is often bleeding, and secondary infection to the area, causing pain and discomfort. There are many dressings available today, which satisfy these requirements, however in some cases the lesions go on to crust up, left looking unsightly.

The case below is one such example of a patient who had a lesion on the back of her head, the care staff were scared to touch it as it looked so awful and consequently it just formed a bigger and bigger smelly scab. The next photo shows how staff would be best to manage the lesion if surgical options are not being considered.

It is ideal to not allow these skin lesions to form scabs. The preferred treatment is to clean away all the ‘muck’ perhaps use an antimicrobial/antiseptic and then a dressing that contains paraffin and an antiseptic. The antiseptic will kill the bacteria and the paraffin will coat the skin cancer so that the covering dressing will not stick and cause trauma when removed. The paraffin will also prevent the area forming another scab if no secondary dressing is used.

Summary
Skin lesions should be reviewed and managed by a plastic surgeon or health professional who is experienced in skin cancer management. If the lesion cannot be cut out and the area sewn up then dressing becomes the management option. Dressing selection is based on managing bacteria, reducing desiccation and not causing further trauma to the lesion when being redressed.

By Jan Rice  
Coordinator Wound Education World of Wounds  
www.worldofwounds.com