



Radiation versus Mohs Surgery? Great Question!

Skin Cancer is a serious matter that merits careful decisions. Radiation treatment is now being marketed for the treatment of skin cancer in some parts of the country. Is radiation best to treat every skin cancer?

The fact is that many skin cancers are treated daily, successfully, safely, and cost effectively by standard surgical excision or by non-surgical methods such as curettage or topical medications. For more complicated skin cancers, Mohs Surgery remains the Gold Standard of care. If the skin cancer requires greater attention, then make sure you understand the differences between Mohs Surgery and radiation therapy and clearly understand Medicare's position on the use of radiation as well.

When does Medicare say that radiation treatment of skin cancer is appropriate? Medicare considers radiation therapy medically reasonable and necessary for BCCs and SCCs **only when surgical treatment is not indicated**. Reasons to defer surgery would be if the patient has certain medical conditions that would complicate a surgery (low platelet counts, bleeding disorders, concurrent infections, etc) or if the surgery would result in significant cosmetic or functional impairment. Medicare recognizes that surgical treatment may be deferred due to patient preference. In the December 2012 issue of the Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology, a landmark study was performed by Dr. Armand Cognetta and colleagues entitled: "Superficial x-ray in the treatment of basal and squamous cell carcinomas: A viable option in select patients". These authors concluded that: "Superficial x-ray therapy remains a viable nonsurgical option for the treatment of primary BCC and SCC in patients where surgical intervention is declined, inadvisable, or potentially associated with significant cosmetic or functional limitations."

Which Physicians does Medicare allow to perform radiation treatment of skin cancers? In the State of Florida, Medicare officially (LCD information L31510) states that **to perform radiation treatment of skin cancer, the physician must have training and expertise acquired within the framework of an accredited residency and/or fellowship.**

"Just because you OWN your airplane, doesn't make you a good pilot, or even a pilot for that matter."

– Frank Fisher, Colonel, Retired USAF Fighter Pilot

Let's compare the cure rates of Mohs Surgery and

Radiation. Mohs surgery treats only the skin involved with the cancer. Since what you simply see on the surface of the skin may not be what is seen under the microscope, Mohs Surgery can track and remove the "roots" of the skin cancer wherever they may travel. Mohs Surgery has long term recurrence rates less than 1% for the treatment of BCC and less than 3% for SCC. Radiation treatment involves treating the "best guess" of where the skin cancer resides. The radiation field *hopefully* treats the entire skin cancer, but radiation treatments will definitely also treat normal uninvolved skin. In a recent study in the Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology, the 5 year recurrence rates of BCC and SCC treated with superficial x-ray ranged from 4-7%. Outcomes may be better if tumors are selected for nonaggressive features and the physician performing the radiation is very experienced.

Let's consider the cosmetic outcomes. While no one ever wants a skin cancer, no one wants a scar or deformity from having it treated either. Mohs Surgery preserves the normal uninvolved skin and it results in smaller surgical defects and allows more simple reconstructions. Simple, smaller, and less complicated reconstructions will yield superior cosmetic and functional outcomes. With Mohs Surgery, every scar is minimized. Radiation treatment does not require surgical reconstruction because surgery has not been performed. In experienced hands, radiation treatment of skin cancer can indeed impart favorable cosmetic outcomes. But, radiation treatment of skin cancers can also result in

permanently white, scar-like patches that can even become sunken or depressed due to collateral radiation injury of the underlying (and uninvolved) tissues and structures.

Let's consider the trips to the doctor's office. Do you know what Fractions are? A fraction is a divided dose of total radiation. Each fraction equates to one trip to the doctor's office. For proper treatment of skin cancers, 5 – 22 fractions may be required. Consider the time and expense of driving to the doctor's office, waiting in the waiting room, getting set up for the treatment, receiving the radiation treatment, checking out, paying for your visit, then driving home – and then consider doing that up to twenty one MORE times. That's a lot of time and fuel! Mohs Surgery does not involve fractions. Mohs Surgery is performed in just one trip to the dermatologist's office with generally one follow-up trip one week after surgery.

Let's examine costs. The websites of the radiation equipment manufacturers admit that the cost for radiation is greater than that of Mohs Surgery. Radiation equates to more money out of your pocket and our already overburdened health care system.

What is "The Norm" for the treatment of skin cancer with radiation? In comprehensive skin cancer treatment centers where on-site radiation by credentialed and highly-trained physicians is available, less than 5% of all complex skin cancers are actually treated with radiation.

The GOLD Standard of care today for the treatment of certain (but not all) non-melanoma skin cancers is Mohs Micrographic Surgery. Mohs Surgery is more convenient, has a higher cure rate, and is more cost effective.

The Importance of FELLOWSHIP-TRAINED Mohs Surgery. Whether piloting an aircraft or performing Mohs Surgery, an advanced procedure requires formal advanced training! At Coastal Skin Surgery and Dermatology, ALL Mohs Surgery and surgical reconstruction is performed by a FELLOWSHIP-TRAINED Mohs Surgeon, Dr. David Adams. Dr. Adams completed a one-year fellowship in Mohs Surgery in 2005 and has earned the standing of a Fellow of the American COLLEGE of Mohs Surgeons, a distinction earned by fewer than 8% of all US Dermatologists. Dr. Adams clearly understands the role of radiation for the treatment of select skin cancers in certain situations. In such instances, these patients are referred to fellowship-trained radiation oncologists to uphold Florida's Medicare LCD guidelines and to provide the highest standards of safe, clinical care to every patient.



For more information on Mohs Surgery and the Difference of Fellowship Training in Mohs Surgery, please refer to our website www.coastalskinsurgery.com or to www.mohscollege.org.



Coastal Skin Surgery and Dermatology was voted the **Best Dermatology Practice on the Emerald Coast** in 2012. We place the needs and concerns of every patient first and provide unparalleled quality dermatologic care in a quiet, compassionate and professional setting. If you desire the best for your skin, we invite you to experience what your friends and neighbors call the Best Dermatology Practice on The Emerald Coast.

It's YOUR skin, It's YOUR choice, Make it Count!

