Dermatology Department

Squamous Cell Carcinoma (SCC)

What are the aims of this leaflet?

The aims of this leaflet are to help you understand what a Squamous Cell Carcinoma is, how they are caused, what treatments are available and preventative measures.

What is a Squamous Cell Carcinoma?

Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) is a cancer of the squamous cells found at the base of the top layer of skin (epidermis). SCC's are the second most common type of skin cancer.

They are very slow growing and usually remain in the outer layer of the skin. However, if left untreated they occasionally spread to other organs in the body. Since SCC's can disfigure, especially on the face, early diagnosis and treatment are important.

What causes Squamous Cell Carcinoma?

Squamous cell carcinomas are caused by long-term exposure to sunlight (ultra-violet light) or the use of sun-beds. On the lips they are associated with cigarette smoking. Less common causes are X-ray therapy, trauma and arsenic (found in old-fashioned tonics and tars).

What areas does Squamous Cell Carcinoma affect?

SCC's can occur on any part of the body, but are most common on the areas that are exposed to the sun, that is lips, ears, hands, shoulders and limbs. Those most at risk are outdoor workers and the very fair skinned. They are most common in those over 65 years

What do I look for?

Any spot on the skin which does not heal should be shown to your doctor.

A squamous cell carcinoma can appear as:

- An open sore. It may bleed or crust and does not heal.
- A red and scaly patch on the skin. Itching and pain are rare.
- A raised smooth bump with a 'dent' in the centre.
- A scaly, warty lump on the skin.

compassionate care

Can Squamous Cell Carcinoma recur?

Yes, although this is unlikely. The nose, lips and ears are possible sites of recurrence; therefore, it is important to remember the early warning signs.

Treatment

All the treatments aim to cure.
SCC's are usually treated by a minor surgical procedure in which the affected area of skin or lesion is removed. The treatment is carried out as an outpatient procedure and is done under a local anaesthetic. It depends on the size and site of the lesion as to which surgeon does the surgery e.g. dermatology / plastic / ophthalmic / oral maxillofacial surgeon. You will be referred to the appropriate department following discussion with your Doctor / Consultant.

Other types of treatment which are used less frequently are:

Curettage and Cautery – the SCC is scraped away (curettage), the skin is then cauterized (to stop bleeding).

Cryotherapy – freezing of the SCC using liquid nitrogen.

Moh's Technique Surgery – used in specialists centres only and for specific SCC's.

Radiotherapy – treatment with X-rays. Usually for SCC's which are too large for surgery or is in an awkward area e.g. ears.

Chemotherapy – treatment with drugs and only used if the SCC has spread to other parts of the body.

Prevention and Sun Awareness

Avoid Sunburn!

Reduce the amount of skin you are exposing to the sun – cover up, wear a brimmed hat, long sleeves and trousers.

Avoid strong sunlight between 11am and 3pm.

Don't use sunbeds.

Use a sunscreen (Sun Protection Factor [SPF] 30) and apply 2-3 hourly, the higher the SPF the better protection. A 'broad spectrum' sunscreen protects against UVA and UVB rays, and one that is water resistant, so that it does not wash off or sweat off following application, is the better choice. Check the expiry date.

Remember to protect your skin if you are going on a winter skiing/beach holiday.

Follow up

The consultant will decide the type of follow-up you receive as a result of the treatment you have had and how successful it has been.

Further Information can be obtained from the following:

Macmillan Cancer Support
Information Service
Telephone No. 0808 808 0000
www.macmillan.org.uk

British Association of Dermatologist
4 Fitzroy Square
London
W1T 5 HQ
www.bad.org.uk

Marc's Line Resource Centre
Dermatology Treatment Centre
Level 3
Salisbury District Hospital
Salisbury
SP2 8BJ
www.wessexcancer.org

Reference source:

Patient Information Leaflet Squamous Cell Carcinoma www.bad.org.uk/SCC. 2008

If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :

Skin Cancer Clinical Nurse Specialist
Dermatology Department
Calderdale Royal Hospital

Telephone (01422) 224154

www.cht.nhs.uk

If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.

Potřebujete-li tyto informace v jiném formátu nebo jazyce, obraťte se prosím na výše uvedené oddělení

Jeżeli są Państwo zainteresowani otrzymaniem tych informacji w innym formacie lub wersji językowej, prosimy skontaktować się z nami, korzystając z ww. danych kontaktowych

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