



DR NIVANA RAMLACHAN
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SKINMATTERS

Mohs and Reconstruction Unit

MOHS SURGERY AND RECONSTRUCTION FOR SKIN CANCER AT CLUB SURGICAL CENTRE

There is an epidemic of skin cancer in the world, and South Africa is no exception. Although the most dangerous skin cancer is malignant melanoma, the most common ones are known as basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma, collectively known as non-melanoma skin cancer (NMSC).

These cancers are primarily caused by prior sunburns, and therefore occur on skin previously exposed to the sun. NMSC is destructive to healthy tissues, and some aggressive forms may even metastasize to the lymph glands and into the body. With the face being the most common area where they occur, including the nose, ears, lips and eyelids, removing and curing them with the highest degree of certainty, without sacrificing the surrounding healthy tissues is of utmost importance.

Early skin cancers can often be treated effectively by dermatologists and other doctors through cauterization as well as other non-surgical methods such as cream followed by light (photodynamic therapy), injections with anticancer medication (interferon-alpha) and anticancer creams (imiquimod). Larger cancers, cancers with more aggressive growth patterns, cancers recurring following previous treatment, incompletely removed cancers, or cancers involving important areas such as nose, ears, lips and eyelids should be treated with surgery.

Traditional surgery removing the cancer with a wide rim of healthy surrounding tissue has the limitation that it is essentially "blind", meaning tumor can be left behind, and to reduce that risk, the surgeon often has to sacrifice additional surrounding healthy tissue, leading to larger defects and reconstructions. Even then, complete tumour removal is at best a calculated guess.

An improvement over the "blind" technique is to have a pathologist on hand in theatre to perform a few random tissue sections to assist the surgeon in determining if the tumor is fully removed. This technique is expensive in pathologist and theatre time, making it impractical as a routine procedure. Although it improves on the cure rate of a "blind" excision, the whole cut surface is not evaluated but random areas only, therefore tumor can still be left behind.

The Gold Standard surgical method worldwide for the most effective removal of skin cancer is a technique called Mohs Surgery. ("Mohs" refers to the surname of the doctor who first practiced it). With this technique, performed in most cases under a local anaesthetic, the tumor is removed with a thin layer of surrounding healthy tissue. The removed tissue is then processed immediately by the Mohs surgeon in an on-site Mohs histology laboratory, while the patient returns to the ward.

The Mohs specific method of processing allows tissue slides to be produced that shows the whole, 100% complete cut surface around the tumour. These slides are then examined by the Mohs surgeon and will show very accurately any remaining tumour, including the exact area on the tumour wound where tumour is still present. If tumour is detected, the patient then returns to the day theatre and the process is repeated, but only on the area of remaining tumour, leaving the healthy tumour-free part of the wound alone. This continues until all margins are confirmed to be clear of tumour.

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The end result is the highest possible level of certainty that the skin cancer has been completely removed, with the smallest possible defect, making closure of the wound potentially simpler and without fear of any remaining tumour.

In 2013 Dr. Pieter du Plessis completed an American Society of Dermatologic Surgery ITMP Fellowship in Mohs Surgery in the United States. His mentor is a past president of both the American College of Mohs Surgery and of the American Academy of Dermatology, Dr. Brett Coldiron.



Dr. Pieter du Plessis and his Mohs Fellowship mentor Dr. Brett Coldiron, in theater in the Skin Cancer Centre in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Dr. Brett Coldiron is Director of and practices from The Skin Cancer Centre in Cincinnati, Ohio, where a group of Mohs surgeons, Mohs Fellows, assisting doctors, nursing staff and histotechnologists work in a Centre dedicated entirely to Skin Cancer and Mohs Surgery.

Following the Mohs training Dr. du Plessis set up a Mohs Micrographic Surgery Unit at the Life Brooklyn Day Hospital. The unit flourished at Brooklyn Day Hospital, and grew to include three specialist reconstructive surgeons, a second Mohs surgeon (trained by Dr. Pieter du Plessis) and a dedicated histology laboratory with three histotechnologists.

In September 2018, after 4 years and 3000 Mohs cases the unit moved to premises purposely designed and built bespoke for the Skinmatters Mohs Micrographic and Reconstructive Surgery Unit at the Club Surgical Centre in Hazelwood, Pretoria.

Dr. Pieter du Plessis was approved by the American Society of Dermatologic Surgery ITMP International Fellowship Recognition Program to establish a Mohs Fellowship training program at the Skinmatters Unit, and appointed as Fellowship Director and Overseas Fellow of the ASDS. This means Mohs Surgery training can now be attained for the first time in South Africa. Dr. Nivana Ramlachan was the first dermatologist trained by the unit as a Mohs Surgeon, and she has subsequently joined the unit. The second Mohs Fellow, Dr. Tshepo Mokwena, is currently in training.

In addition to completing the ASDS ITMP Mohs Fellowship in the United States, Dr. du Plessis has also completed the courses, requirements and fellowship examination of the American Society of Mohs Surgery, to be accepted as an ASMS International Member of Distinction.

He was also accepted to and completes the yearly Royal Australian College of Pathologists Quality Assurance Program's Mohs Histology Module.

The Skinmatters Mohs Micrographic and Reconstructive Surgery Unit regularly hosts workshops and receives international Mohs Surgeons either as guests, or as part of yearly site visits for quality control.

Patients are seen by referral only, and following successful Mohs Surgery and Reconstruction, are referred back to the referring doctor/ practice.

For more information or referrals Dr. du Plessis can be contacted at:

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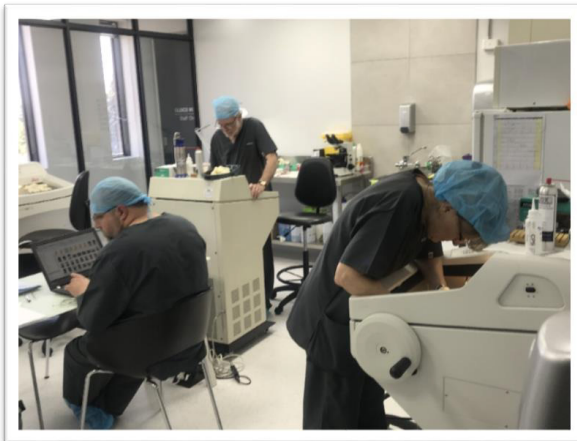
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Dr. du Plessis and the Mohs Micrographic Surgery team at the Club Surgical Centre.



Being taught to cut accurate Mohs histology sections in the Mohs histology lab at The Skin Cancer Centre in Cincinnati, Ohio.



Processing of tissue in the Mohs laboratory at Club Surgical Centre.



Dr. du Plessis performing Mohs Micrographic Surgery at the Club Surgical Centre.



Cutting Mohs sections in the Mohs laboratory at Club Surgical Centre.



Typical Mohs map and tissue being processed of a Mohs skin cancer.

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