

## **Actinic Keratosis**

### **“Pre-Cancer” or “Solar Keratosis”**

#### **Patient Education**

**Actinic Keratoses** (AK) are the earliest form of a skin cancer that ultimately can lead to Squamous Cell Carcinomas (a potentially serious skin cancer that is prone to metastasize or spread internally). They usually present as **small scaly, red, or crusted non-healing spots**. They typically occur in fair or light skinned individuals on sun-exposed skin such as the face, neck, and arms. Although usually asymptomatic, they often can have a raw, burning or sticker-like sensation.

As a general rule – cuts, scrapes, and abrasions should heal within a 4 to 6 week period of time. Any lesion that fails to completely heal within 6 weeks should raise a **“red flag”** in your mind to seek evaluation.

#### **Special issues:**

- \* If a lesion is treated and you fail to respond – it is very important to notify the doctor since this could mean that the lesion has already “crossed the line” and formed an invasive skin cancer.
- \* If you develop actinic keratosis – this means you are at much higher risk for skin cancers such as Basal Cell and Squamous Cell carcinomas.
- \* You should **follow up** with your physician at least **once a year** and often more frequently if you are prone to developing actinic keratoses.
- \* **Sun avoidance** and aggressive use of **sunscreens** and can make a big difference in reducing the tendency to grow actinic keratoses – and may even cause them to resolve.

#### **Treatment options:**

There are many treatment options available for actinic keratoses. Your physician will choose the best treatment option for your particular circumstances.

- \* **Liquid nitrogen** – the spots are individually frozen off and this is the most commonly used form of treatment.
- \* **Topical Chemotherapy** – Medications such as Carac, Solaraze, Efudex, or Aldara & Picato can be used to treat folks who have extensive involvement.
- \* **Photo-dynamic therapy** – this is a less commonly used but potentially effective treatment (not performed in my clinic).
- \* **Chemical Peels** using glycolic acid or TCA - I have found this to be less effective than Topical Chemotherapy.