

What is a Dermatologist?

A dermatologist is a physician who has expertise in the diagnosis and treatment of patients with benign and malignant disorders of the skin, mouth, external genitalia, hair and nails, as well as a number of sexually transmitted diseases. Dermatologists have extensive training and experience in the diagnosis and treatment of skin cancers, melanomas, moles, and other tumors of the skin, contact dermatitis and other allergic and non-allergic disorders, and in the recognition of the skin manifestations of systemic (including internal malignancy), and infectious diseases. The dermatologist also has expertise in the management of cosmetic disorders of the skin such as hair loss and scars.

To be certified as a dermatologist, a physician must have had at least four years of post-graduate residency training accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education. The first broad-based general clinical year is followed by three years of intensive training in dermatology including dermatopathology and dermatologic surgery. In addition to the successful completion of the four years of required training, the certification process includes a comprehensive examination administered by the American Board of Dermatology. With this background and knowledge, dermatologists are singularly qualified to diagnose and treat the wide variety of dermatologic conditions as well as benign and malignant skin tumors. Dermatologists also have expertise in the care of normal skin and in the prevention of skin diseases and skin cancers.

What do Dermatologists Do?

Dermatologists perform many specialized diagnostic procedures including microscopic examination of skin biopsy specimens, cytological smears, patch tests, photo tests, potassium hydroxide (KOH) preparations, fungus cultures and other microbiologic examination of skin scrapings and secretions. Treatment methods used by dermatologists include externally applied, injected, and internal medications, selected x-ray and ultraviolet light therapy, and a range of dermatologic surgical procedures. The training and experience of dermatologists in dermatologic surgery include electrosurgery, cryosurgery with the use of freezing surgical units, laser surgery, nail surgery, biopsy techniques and excisional surgery with appropriate closures, including flaps and grafts. Among some of the techniques used by dermatologists for the correction of cosmetic defects are dermabrasion, chemical face peels, hair transplants, injections of materials into the skin for scar revision, sclerosis of veins, and laser surgery of vascular lesions of the skin, including certain birth marks. Patients seeking a dermatologist may come directly or may be referred by another physician. A certified specialist in dermatology may subspecialize and become certified for Special Qualification. In 1988, an AAD Task Force on Professional Guidelines under the Committee on Guidelines of Care was appointed by the Academy's President to develop a document that would clearly define what a dermatologist is and does, as well as detail the extensive and rigorous medical and surgical training required prior to specialty board certification. The first report on credentialing and privileging was approved by the AAD Board of Directors in 1990. It is periodically updated and reflects the best data available at the time it is prepared:

American Board of Dermatology: www.abderm.org.html

What is Dermatopathology?

Dermatopathologists are physicians who after completing their training in either dermatology or pathology pursued additional training in accredited programs for the interpretation of skin biopsies. These physicians integrate the clinical information with microscopic observations of the biopsy from the patient to provide diagnostic information to the treating physician. Dermatopathology is a consultative service to the referring dermatologist and not simply a laboratory test. The accurate microscopic interpretation of the biopsy is important in the selection of appropriate therapies.

American Society of Dermatopathology: www.asdp.org/mission.html