Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Frequently Asked Questions About Reflectance Confocal Microscopy for Skin Lesions

This information answers frequently asked questions about reflectance confocal microscopy for skin lesions. A skin lesion is an area of abnormal skin. Lesions can be benign (not cancer) or cancerous (cancer).

What is reflectance confocal microscopy?

Reflectance confocal microscopy (RCM) is a way for your healthcare provider to see structures in your skin at a cellular level. This helps them understand more about the skin lesion(s) being scanned.

RCM uses a low-power laser light. The light travels through the top layers of your skin to focus on a single point in your skin. This lets your healthcare provider take images at different depths in your skin.

RCM is done in your dermatologist (skin doctor)’s office. It’s a non-invasive and painless procedure. Non-invasive

means your skin won't be cut or broken during the procedure. You won't be exposed to any radiation during your RCM procedure.

Why is RCM useful?

Your healthcare provider may recommend RCM to help them see if a skin lesion is cancerous. RCM can help your healthcare provider avoid taking biopsies (tissue samples) that aren't needed. It can also help them decide the best way to manage or treat the area of concern.

How should I get ready before my RCM procedure?

Before your RCM procedure:

- Don't put lotion or other moisturizers on your skin in the area being scanned.
- Wear clothing that's loose or easy to take off. You'll need to move or remove any clothing covering your skin in the area being scanned.

You don't need to do anything else to get ready for your RCM procedure.

What will happen during my RCM procedure?

You'll lie down on a reclining exam chair. The healthcare provider doing your procedure will put a small amount of mineral oil or surgical gel on your skin in the area being scanned. They'll place a clear plastic window cap on your skin and attach the RCM probe to the cap.

During your RCM procedure, the healthcare provider will adjust the probe to look at different areas in the window cap. Sometimes, they'll pause to look at an area more closely. They may also press the probe more firmly into your skin to get a clearer view of an area. You may feel some pressure on your skin when they do this.

Your RCM procedure can take from 15 to 45 minutes. You'll be able to see the RCM images during or after your procedure.

What will happen after my RCM procedure?

The healthcare provider will take the probe off the window cap. They'll take the cap off your skin and wipe away the oil or gel.

Usually, your healthcare provider will look at the RCM images right after your procedure. They'll talk with you about the images. Depending on what the images show,

your healthcare provider may recommend other tests or procedures. They may also ask you to come back to their office so they can monitor the areas that were scanned. If they do, make sure to keep these appointments.

Your RCM procedure won't affect your skin. You can go back to all your usual activities right away after your RCM procedure.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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