



**PETER
CALLAN**

PLASTIC SURGEON

Basal cell carcinoma

(Basal cell cancer)

What is it?

Basal cell carcinoma (BCC) is so called because it develops in the layer of skin called the basal layer where new cells are constantly being formed. Seventy-five per cent of all skin cancers in Australia are of this type. Fortunately it doesn't spread to other parts of the body but it does have a propensity to invade into the surrounding skin and anything else close by. Sun exposure causes most BCCs but there are other factors which are important. Some people have a genetic predisposition to developing this type of skin cancer.

There are various types of BCC and treatment depends on the type and where it is. Methods available include curettage, excision, freezing, creams, radiotherapy and light treatment. There are other options utilised for special cases. For example, Mohs micrographic surgery is a technique to remove difficult or large tumours, particularly around the nose and eyes.

In some cases it is difficult to diagnose a BCC from its outward appearance and a diagnostic biopsy may be needed. This means removing a small piece of the tumour for examination under the microscope by a pathologist in a lab.

In summary, BCCs are the most common type of skin cancer which means they are the most common type of any cancer. Different types of BCC have different appearances and different patterns of growth. A skin spot which bleeds may be a BCC. Since BCCs rarely spread (metastasise) throughout the body, the main problem is that if they are not removed early they can spread locally, ultimately requiring extensive and perhaps disfiguring surgery. It is important to recognise them before they get to this stage.