

## **Actinic Keratosis**

An actinic keratosis is a pre-cancerous lesion which results from sun damage, usually from decades ago. These areas often begin as small rough areas that may be easier to feel with your finger than they are to see. At first, they have a tendency to “come and go,” but with time, they will persist. It is important to have these areas treated because an actinic keratosis can turn into a squamous cell carcinoma (skin cancer) if left untreated. Aggressive treatment of precancerous lesions can reduce the number of skin biopsies and skin cancer surgery that you will need.

Common treatment options for actinic keratosis include cryotherapy or “freezing” with liquid nitrogen and a topical cream called 5-fluorouracil (Carac and Effudex are brand names for the same cream.).

### **Carac Cream (5-Fluorouracil)**

Carac cream is a very effective method of treating actinic keratosis. It provides excellent results, but is sometimes unpleasant to use. Knowing the following will help make the experience tolerable.

- Standard treatment will include once daily application of the cream for three weeks.
- During those three weeks, the actinic keratoses will look worse before they look better.
- While using the cream, the involved areas will become red and inflamed. They may ooze, crust, and even sometimes bleed. They will continue to worsen until the cream is stopped.
- Once the cream is stopped, the inflamed areas will heal up over the next 7-10 days.
- The cosmetic result is usually excellent once healing is complete.
- This cream only affects sun damaged skin, it has no effect upon normal skin that is not sun damaged.
- When using the cream, it will “uncover” sun damage that you did not know you had – areas that appeared normal may become inflamed because they had underlying sun damage.
- **Keep in mind that everyone responds differently to this kind of medication. If you feel that you are having an “extraordinary” response, or you have any other questions, you should stop using the cream and call our office to speak with a nurse.**