

# New imaging tool bypasses blade to check for skin cancer

November 20 2013, by Chris Defrancesco

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Dr. Jane Grant-Kels analyzes the images and determines the lesion is benign.  
Credit: Tina Encarnacion/UConn Health Center

(Medical Xpress)—You have a suspicious mole on your skin. It doesn't hurt, but it looks different than it did six months ago.

You're reluctant to see your dermatologist, because you don't look forward to the idea of having a piece of your [skin](#) cut out for a biopsy to

be studied under a microscope.

At the UConn Health Center, patients often can avoid the pain and scarring of a biopsy, thanks to a laser imaging tool that enables analysis of the skin at the [cellular level](#).

It's known as confocal microscopy, and Dr. Jane Grant-Kels, the UConn Health Center's dermatology chair, is the only dermatologist in Connecticut trained to read the imaging this technology yields.

"With this technology I can actually see the cells," Grant-Kels says. "It goes just below the epidermis, into the superficial dermis. But that's deep enough for me to be able to diagnose most skin cancers, including most melanomas, [basal cell carcinomas](#) and [squamous cell carcinomas](#) versus a benign lesion that does not need to be treated. The technology is amazing."

What she's seen over the last several months is a noticeable decline in biopsies she's had to perform, because in many cases she can diagnose [skin cancer](#)—or rule it out—before that step is necessary.

"I can actually look at the skin histology without doing a biopsy. That's pretty exciting," Grant-Kels says. "I can look at the sections horizontally, which gives me the ability to see more pathology than I can even under the microscope."

Medical assistant Jody D'Antonio captures the images and sends them to Grant-Kels' computer for her to analyze.

"It shows me the lesion, and it shows me the actual cells that make up that lesion," D'Antonio says. "Who wants to be stuck with a needle? Who wants to be cut? Nobody wants that."

Grant-Kels says it's too soon to say for sure how many patients could be spared biopsies using [confocal microscopy](#), but that it wouldn't surprise her if someday it resulted in a reduction of more than 50 percent.

Provided by University of Connecticut

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