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Curettage of skin cancer—the bruised apple analogy

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To the Editor:

Tactile feedback from a curette allows the surgeon to distinguish the soft, friable tumor from the surrounding fibrous dermis. This technique is frequently used to debulk the cancer to better define tumor margins and to aid in proper tissue processing in Mohs micrographic surgery [1]. When combined with electrosurgery, curettage is also an efficient and effective treatment for low-risk non-melanoma skin cancers in non-terminal hair bearing skin [2,3]. The concept and utility of curettage, however, can be difficult to explain to patients and trainees.

In our experience, the bruised apple analogy can help explain the goals of curettage. The skin cancer is represented by the bruised and decaying part of the apple whereas the rest of the fruit is analogous to the surrounding healthy skin (**Figure 1**). When one pushes on the bruised part of the apple, similar to one curetting a skin cancer, the mushy, friable aspects give away until healthier surrounding tissue is reached. In contrast, the healthy intact aspects of the apple provide resistance to pressure similar to how normal surrounding dermis provides resistance and feedback to a surgeon's curette. Pressure on a



Figure 1. The bruised aspect of the apple compared to its healthy surrounding fruit is analogous to skin cancer in relationship to its healthier surrounding dermis.

bruised apple or curettage of a skin cancer both help delineate the texture change between the diseased and normal tissue. This analogy is a practical way to explain how curettage is useful in the debulking of skin cancers.

Potential conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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