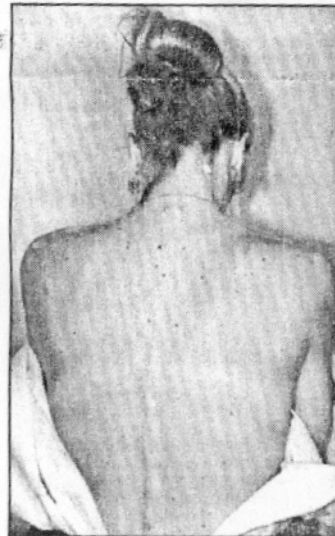


Maryellen Maguire-Eisen takes a video still image of Lori McCaffrey during a visit to the South Shore Skin Care Center in Hingham. The digital technology is used to help detect moles that could become cancerous.



GREG DERR photos/The Patriot Ledger  
Because she has more than 100 moles on her body, Lori McCaffrey seldom goes out in the sun without using sunscreen.

## 'Mole-mapping' technology helps prevent skin cancer

By KRISTINA BRENNEMAN  
The Patriot Ledger

**A** new digital technology being used by a Hingham dermatologist will make it easier to detect moles that could become cancerous.

Use of the "mole-mapping" technology, which involves a nurse using a hand-held digital camera to film irregular moles and transferring it by film card to computer, should help reduce the incidence of skin cancer, said Dr. Richard Eisen of the South Shore Skin Center.

Eisen can view the images on his laptop computer each time the patient comes in for a checkup, and better track any changes in the shape, color and size of the moles. Patients can also carry home a computer printout or a CD-ROM that they can use to monitor their own moles.

"I encourage patients to examine themselves," Eisen said. "If someone has 100 moles, how reasonable is it to expect them to notice one change? With a CD-ROM they can scan their body in the mirror and check any changes with their own computer, which is important because doctors are only seeing a patient every six months."

A majority of moles or blemishes never develop into

**"I've had moles removed already because they increased in size. So this is reassuring."**

Lori McCaffrey,  
"mole-mapping" patient

cancer. They appear on the chest, back, feet, scalp, legs, and even inside the retina of the eye. One man mistook a cancerous mole on his toe for a wart.

Duxbury resident Lori McCaffrey, 39, has more than 100 moles on her body and rarely goes out in the sun without sunscreen. During Friday's visit to Eisen's office, a nurse practitioner videotaped the moles on McCaffrey so the doctor can refer to the film next time she visits.

"I've had moles removed already because they increased in size," she said. "So this is reassuring."  
Most health insurers pay the \$250 cost for the

# Digital 'mole-mapping' helps prevent skin cancer



GREG DERR/The Patriot Ledger

Video stills taken of a client can be pieced together to create a map of moles on a body. A change in mole size, doctors say, can be an early warning sign of skin cancer.

## ■ TECHNOLOGY Continued from Page 13

screening. Eisen is seeking approval from other insurers.

"It's the wave of the future," he said. "Insurance companies reimburse for X-rays for lung cancer. This is a record for skin cancer. And it will be cost effective because it will prevent us from taking off moles that don't need to be removed."

There's much debate among dermatologists whether photographic records make a difference in detecting changes over time to a patient's mole.

"I'm not into waiting to see if a melanoma is abnormal," said Dr. Stephen Werth of Associates of South Shore Dermatology. "You don't get second chances with melanoma. This is not an area where you are allowed errors. Once it starts people can die in months or years."

A decade ago no one worried about the appearance of a mole or of sunbathing for hours. Scientists have since found that long exposures to the sun can cause melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer.

"The public is far more tuned into sun being harmful, which has been more our goal," Werth said.

Melanoma can grow in an existing mole or new growth on the skin, and if detected early can easily be removed at a doctor's office. Uneven borders; varied shades of brown, tan

**"You don't get second chances with melanoma. This is not an area where you are allowed errors. Once it starts people can die in months or years."**

Dr. Stephen Werth,  
Associates of South Shore Dermatology

or black; an asymmetrical shape; and a size larger than a pencil eraser are all tell-tale signs of melanoma.

If the growth goes undetected, the cancer cells can spread to other parts of the body, first through the bloodstream and then into the lymph nodes.

At Werth's office they see one or two cases a week. The number of people diagnosed with skin cancer has doubled over the past 20 years. This year, about 42,000 people nationwide will be diagnosed with melanoma.

"We're seeing a lot more melanoma than we used to," Werth said. "It's not like ovarian cancer with no warning signs. It's (the mole) there for you to look at."

Some doctors take Polaroid photos of a patient's mole to check any changes over a

six-month to year period.

Eisen, one of the first in the region to use the \$30,000 DermaGraphix Digital Mole Mapping software, said it will allow him to store 34 images of the patient's body. He can use split-screen and four-way images to compare any changes to moles over a six-month to year period. On the computer screen he can also measure the mole's size, shape and any changes to its appearance.

The software is not for every patient. Eisen said it would only be used with patients with a high risk, such as those with a family history of skin cancer or an unusual number of irregular or pigmented moles.

"The gold standard is the pathology report" after you remove the mole for laboratory testing, Eisen said. "But what if you have a patient with 100 moles? You can't do that with every one. The key is to detect moles that are changing."

That's reassuring for McCaffrey, whose 14-year-old daughter has had four moles removed because they changed shape. "Now they can watch them," she said.

Eventually, dermatologists using the software hope to pool their patient information to do a study of skin cancer, he said.

Risk factors for melanoma include a family history of skin cancer; unusual moles; previous diagnosis of melanoma; regular use of a tanning bed; more than 50 ordinary moles; severe blistering sunburns; many freckles; fair skin and light eyes.