
Standardization of terminology in dermoscopy/dermatoscopy: Results of the third consensus conference of the International Society of Dermoscopy



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Background: Evolving dermoscopic terminology motivated us to initiate a new consensus.

Objective: We sought to establish a dictionary of standardized terms.

Methods: We reviewed the medical literature, conducted a survey, and convened a discussion among experts.

Results: Two competitive terminologies exist, a more metaphoric terminology that includes numerous terms and a descriptive terminology based on 5 basic terms. In a survey among members of the International Society of Dermoscopy (IDS) 23.5% (n = 201) participants preferentially use descriptive terminology, 20.1% (n = 172) use metaphoric terminology, and 484 (56.5%) use both. More participants who had been initially trained by metaphoric terminology prefer using descriptive terminology than vice versa (9.7% vs 2.6%, $P < .001$). Most new terms that were published since the last consensus conference in 2003 were unknown to the majority of the participants. There was uniform consensus that both terminologies are suitable, that metaphoric terms need definitions, that synonyms should be avoided, and that the creation of new metaphoric terms should be discouraged. The expert panel proposed a dictionary of standardized terms taking account of metaphoric and descriptive terms.

Limitations: A consensus seeks a workable compromise but does not guarantee its implementation.

Conclusion: The new consensus provides a revised framework of standardized terms to enhance the consistent use of dermoscopic terminology. (J Am Acad Dermatol 2016;74:1093-106.)

Key words: consensus; dermatoscopy; melanoma; nevi; noninvasive diagnosis; nonmelanoma skin cancer; pigmented skin lesions; terminology.

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Dermoscopy (dermatoscopy) is a widely used noninvasive diagnostic technique. It improves the diagnostic accuracy for pigmented lesions in comparison with examination with the unaided eye.¹⁻⁴ Although initially it was mainly used for diagnosis of neoplastic lesions, its indications have recently been expanded to include inflammatory skin diseases⁵⁻⁷ and hair⁸⁻¹⁰ and nail¹¹⁻¹⁵ diseases. During the last years the vocabulary of dermoscopy has expanded so significantly that it became difficult even for experts to oversee the multitude of terms. The main driving forces for the creation of new terms were the expansion of dermoscopy to new realms and the introduction and dissemination of polarized dermatoscopes that allowed observations of structures previously unseen with nonpolarized dermoscopy.¹⁶⁻²⁰ As a result, the vocabulary of dermoscopy rapidly proliferated, becoming unwieldy and counterproductive.

The language of dermoscopy is technical because of its specific vocabulary that is incomprehensible outside its context. Many terms are metaphors, such as “starburst” pattern or “leaflike” areas.²¹ Although colorful metaphors are memorable, their sheer number and the fact that some are ambiguous, redundant, or just bad analogies make them a potential barrier to learning and research. This was the motivation for creating a descriptive language with a simple and logical structure. The major disadvantage of the descriptive terminology is that complex structures, which can be characterized elegantly in a metaphor, may lead to rather cumbersome and long descriptive expressions.

Because of the pros and cons of metaphoric versus descriptive terminology²²⁻²⁵ and the appearance of a significant number of new terms we organized a new consensus conference. Our primary aims were to harmonize metaphoric and descriptive terminology, to seek consensus on definitions of terms, and to establish a dictionary of standardized terms.

METHODS

In 2013, the International Skin Imaging Collaboration was established to create a set of standards for skin imaging and to create a public repository of skin images. The 3 breakout

International Skin Imaging Collaboration working groups were focused on dermoscopic technology, technique, and terminology. To facilitate annotation and markup of reference images, the terminology working group was charged with developing a dictionary of standardized terms.

In the initial phase of the project, the team leader

of the terminology working group (H. K.) selected a group of experts to discuss possible strategies to reach a consensus on terminology standards in dermoscopy. The initial discussions of the expert group centered on the advantages and disadvantages of metaphoric versus descriptive terminology. There was general agreement that a standardized dictionary should include both terminologies. In an initial attempt to develop a list of standardized terms, it

became obvious that a significant number of new terms were published since the last consensus conference in 2003. In an effort to list all new relevant metaphoric terms, we performed a literature search.

Identification of new technical terms

We searched the PubMed database to identify articles written in English that were published since the last consensus conference in 2003 using the key words “dermoscopy” or “dermatoscopy.” The search identified 2469 publications. Two authors (H. K. and P. T.) screened the abstracts and titles and selected 371 articles for full-text review. In a first round we excluded review articles, articles on trichoscopy, and articles centered on dermoscopy of nails and mucous membranes or the description of inflammatory diseases. After the first full-text review, we identified 113 publications that included 128 new technical terms. In a final round, we excluded terms that are fairly descriptive and terms that could be understood outside the context of dermoscopy (ie, “blood spots”). The final list included 49 new terms that were mainly metaphorical.²⁶⁻⁷¹

IDS survey

Of 8562 IDS members who were invited to participate by e-mail, 1093 took the online, anonymous survey. We asked all participants which dermoscopic education they received as trainees (mainly metaphoric, descriptive, or both

CAPSULE SUMMARY

- Dermoscopy is a widely used diagnostic technique with a distinct technical language.
- We established a standardized dictionary of suitable terms and harmonized metaphoric and descriptive terminology.
- The consensus will serve as a guideline for those who use dermoscopy and will enhance the consistent use of dermoscopic terminology in every day practice, research, and training.

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