

CASE 1



A 78-year-old woman is concerned about progressive redness and scaling of her scalp. She reports increasing pruritus and periodic thick white scales. On exam, the patient is found to have diffuse erythema of the scalp with thick, silvery-white scales involving the occiput. She also has erythematous patches with white scales on her elbows and knees.

What is your diagnosis?

CASE 2



A 47-year-old man seeks consultation for a nodule on his scalp. In the last several months, he has experienced weight loss, shortness of breath, and some coughing of blood-tinged sputum. He denies fever or chills but has a long history of smoking cigarettes. Examination reveals a 1.5-cm reddish nodule involving the right central scalp. The nodule exhibits a central ulceration and is devoid of hair. Chest x-ray demonstrates a pulmonary mass in the right lower lobe. Pulmonology and dermatology are consulted.

What is your diagnosis?

Turn page for answers 

CASE 1



The patient has scalp psoriasis. Involvement of the scalp, along with the elbows and knees, is common in psoriasis. The differential diagnosis of her rash included seborrheic dermatitis and allergic contact dermatitis from hair care products. The lesions of psoriasis often advance to the periphery of the face, posterior neck, and retroauricular areas. Scalp psoriasis frequently improves with use of tar shampoos and topical corticosteroid lotions, solutions, and foams.

CASE 2



The patient has a metastasis to his scalp from an underlying lung cancer. With a lung mass and scalp nodule, the differential diagnosis would include a systemic infectious process or metastatic skin cancer. In men, melanoma, lung cancer, and colon cancer are the most common malignancies metastatic to the skin. In women, breast cancer and melanoma are the most common. Cutaneous metastases have histologic features that are similar—but often not identical—to those of the primary malignancy. A cutaneous metastasis should be considered when a patient presents with a firm, painless, erythematous scalp nodule that ulcerates.

Dr. Bechtel is an associate professor of medicine and director of dermatology at the Ohio State University College of Medicine in Columbus. **Dr. Zirwas** is an assistant professor of medicine in the dermatology division at the Ohio State University College of Medicine.