DERMATOLOGY PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT:
Job Posting and Description
Preamble
Enlisting the services of Physician Assistant (PA) in a dermatology practice is well established in other medical jurisdictions around North America. In Manitoba, a PA would provide invaluable service to the field of dermatology, especially with respect to skin cancer. The burden of skin disease, in general, is well established (some studies estimate that 20% of family practice visits relate to dermatology).\(^1\) The burden of skin cancer alone is overwhelming. Overall, the odds of getting skin cancer in one’s lifetime is between 1:4 and 1:5. The overall morbidity, from disfigurement and mortality, is understandably high. Complicating matters, Canada graduates very few dermatologists per year and Manitoba does not have its own dedicated dermatology program. The dermatologic needs of the community are largely unmet and waiting times to see a dermatologist range from 6 to 12 months for most practices. This leaves patients to wait for inappropriate lengths of time for consultations. Alternatively, they are managed by physicians who lack adequate training in dermatology. The results are most critical for patients with skin cancer. All dermatologists in Manitoba struggle to keep up with patient volumes and all struggle to fit in urgent referrals for skin cancer. A physician assistant would drastically improve patient access and would add significant value and quality to ongoing patient care.

Dr. Afifi’s practice is located at the Winnipeg Clinic. The practice has a special focus on skin cancer and strives to meet this need in Manitoba. The bulk of the practice is dedicated to:

- Mohs surgery (a specialized skin cancer surgery for high risk nonmelanoma skin cancer)
- Standard wide local excision of all types of skin cancer and lesions suspicious for skin cancer
- Medical management of skin cancer and suspicious lesions (skin surveillance, lesion assessment, non surgical treatment of skin cancer)
- Management of skin cancer in the transplant/immunosuppressed population

As early diagnosis and management of skin cancer has the biggest impact on patient outcomes, a PA trained to have expertise in skin cancer would have a significant impact on the health of Manitobans. The position also lends itself to long term job satisfaction. There is an excellent mix of medical and surgical care, wherein the PA would develop advanced skills in both nonsurgical and surgical cutaneous oncology. The Mohs portion of the practice includes not only simple surgical excisions, but also more complex flap and graft reconstruction of facial defects. The lifestyle benefits include favourable and predictable working hours, favourable vacation time, and a lack of both call duties and shift work.

POSITION SUMMARY: Key Duties

1. Patient Assessment
The PA will participate in assessing new patients referred to the practice, as well as follow-up patients. The PA will develop expertise in the clinical evaluation of dermatology patients, with a strong focus on cutaneous oncology. This will include, but not be limited to: recognizing a variety of malignant and benign cutaneous lesions, performing preoperative evaluations, and assessing for postoperative complications.

2. Management Planning and Patient Education
The PA will develop expertise in the planning of investigations and treatments for the patients within the scope of Dr. Afifi’s practice. This will include ordering relevant investigations (e.g. blood work, imaging, microbiology) and performing diagnostic procedures. The PA will be able to review various management options with patients and families. Some treatment procedures will be performed by the PA at the initial time of evaluation. Medical management options will be reviewed and prescribed. The PA will educate patients and families on key aspects of skin cancer and skin cancer prevention.

In addition, the PA will assist in the arrangement of consultations to appropriate services, including medical specialties (Medical and Radiation Oncology), surgical specialties (Plastic Surgery, ENT) and Home Care.

3. Treatments and Procedures
The PA will be trained to perform numerous procedures, particularly as it relates to diagnosing and treating malignant and premalignant lesions. These will include:
   a. Clinic procedures:
      i. Skin biopsy (punch, shave)
      ii. Cryotherapy (premalignant and select malignant lesions)
      iii. Electrodesiccation and curettage (malignant lesions)
   b. More advanced surgical procedures:
      i. Administration of local anesthesia (field blocks, digital blocks)
      ii. Surgical assisting
         1. Preoperative preparation
         2. Maintenance of the surgical field
         3. Assisting in wound closure, including the skillful use of deep (dermal) and superficial (epidermal) suture techniques
      iii. Independently performed procedures (graduated responsibility):
         1. Wide local excision (e.g. nevi, skin cancers, cysts, lipomata), including both lesion excision and closure.
         2. Increasing responsibility for more complex closures of Mohs defects, including primary closure, skin graft closure, local flap closure (e.g. advancement, rotation and transposition flaps).
         3. Dermabrasion for enhanced cosmesis of grafts and flaps
      iv. Post operative surgical site assessment, including assessment for infection, necrosis, and skin graft survival.

4. Communication
The PA will be an integral part of the health care team and liaise with other medical services:
   a. Consultation
i. The PA will assist in the arrangement of consultations from the Supervising Physician with appropriate services including:
   1. Medical specialties (e.g. Medical and Radiation Oncology)
   2. Surgical specialties (e.g. Plastic Surgery, ENT)
   3. Home care

b. Follow-up
   i. The PA will assist in creating follow-up letters to referring physicians to keep them up to date regarding ongoing management of skin cancer

5. Clinic Management
   There is an opportunity to greatly improve the management and flow of skin cancer patients in Manitoba. A PA will greatly facilitate this process. Some duties that the PA will be involved in include:
   i. Establishing an urgent assessment referral system to improve wait times by assisting in triaging skin cancer consultations based on urgency and assessing urgently referred patients
   ii. Assisting in ongoing skin cancer surveillance for at risk populations (e.g. patients with an established history skin cancer, transplant/immunosuppressed patients). Manitoba does not currently have a true transplant clinic and it is the intention of Dr. Afifi to inaugurate such a clinic with the help of a PA.
   iii. Develop better systems for following at risk patients, including the use of baseline photography for longitudinal assessments. This is not practical for a dermatologist working unassisted and would significantly improve patient care.
   iv. Helping to more thoroughly educate patients and families regarding:
      1. Management options for skin cancers, including actinic keratosis, basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma
      2. Treatments discussed may include a discussion of cryotherapy, field therapy, electrodessication and curettage, wide local excision, Mohs surgery, radiation, vismodegib
      3. Potential adverse effects of therapy
      4. Appropriate techniques for using topical anti-cancer therapy for actinic keratoses and superficial basal cell carcinoma
   v. Having a PA in clinic will make many treatments available much quicker, not only to include simple treatments such as cryotherapy, but same-day surgical removal of worrisome lesions

6. Educational Opportunities
   The PA will be able to attend our monthly dermatology journal club, helping to maintain academic excellence and helping establish ties to the dermatology community in Manitoba. The PA will have opportunities to attend relevant conferences, including the Mohs surgery conference.

7. Physician Assistant Training
   Once fully trained, the PA will be a valuable asset to the PA program and will help train PAs destined for primary care. The PA will be expert in teaching other PAs about skin cancer identification, diagnosis and management.

8. Mohs Surgery
Dr. Afifi’s practice is divided between medical and surgical dermatology and focuses chiefly on cutaneous oncology. Roughly 50% of the practice is dedicated to Mohs surgery, which is a specialized technique for removing skin tumors that uses frozen sections to ensure successful tumor removal prior to wound closure.