POSTOPERATIVE CARE: Complications
Complications in the Immediate Postoperative Period

• As part of the informed consent process, the surgeon should thoroughly review all of the anticipated outcomes and possible complications of the procedure with the patient.

• In the immediate postoperative period, patients that have undergone surgery for melanoma are at risk for complications common to all surgeries, such as surgical site infections (SSI), venous thromboembolism (VTE), hemorrhage and others.

• Based on the extent of surgery and the assessed risk of postoperative infection, the surgeon may choose to administer prophylactic antibiotics 30 minutes before the skin incision.
Complications in the Immediate Postoperative Period

• If provided, the choice of antibiotic is dictated by the type of surgery. Since the skin flora such as staphlococcus and streptococcus species are the most likely organisms to lead to SSI following skin surgery, a prophylactic antibiotic with activity against these organisms (such as Cefazolin or Ancef®) may be administered.

• The signs and symptoms of an SSI may include fever, chills, erythema or purulent drainage for the wound or surgical site. When a wound infection develops, the treatment may involve culturing the drainage and beginning the patient on a course of antibiotic therapy.

• VTE prophylaxis should also begin immediately when the patient is put to sleep because that is the period when clot formation begins. Chemical prophylaxis consists of subcutaneous administration of heparin and mechanical prophylaxis consists of the use of pneumatic compression devices applied to the calf upon induction of anesthesia.
Complications in the Immediate Postoperative Period

• Other complications in the immediate postoperative period include seroma or hematoma formation.

• A seroma is a collection of clear fluid in the wound site following surgery while a hematoma is a collection of blood. Frequently seromas can be aspirated with resolution.

• Hematomas usually require surgical evacuation.
Complications in the Late Postoperative Period

- Complications that may occur several weeks after surgery include scarring, contracture and lymphedema.

**Lymphedema**

- Lymphedema is the accumulation of lymphatic fluid in the interstitial tissue that causes swelling most often in the arms and/or legs.

- It can lead to recurrent bouts of cellulitis.

- It results from disruption of the normal lymphatic pathways of the arm or leg.

- The treatment of lymphedema is difficult and many time not very effective.