

Psoriasis may link to other health problems

September 23, 2011 10:30 AM New Wave staff
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The skin reflects the body's general health or the systemic diseases that threaten it. Dr. Erin Boh, chair of the Tulane Department of Dermatology, specializes in treating complicated, chronic diseases like severe psoriasis.



Dr. Erin Boh of Tulane, who specializes in complicated chronic diseases like psoriasis, has been named to the National Psoriasis Foundation medical board because of her expertise and dedication to caring for people with the condition. (Photo by Jackson Hill)

Unlike most dermatologists, who find scant need for listening to hearts and lungs, she uses her stethoscope every day in her medical dermatology practice.

"Psoriasis responds exquisitely to stress ? by getting worse," says [Boh](#). "For example, in atrial fibrillation, when the patient's heart is not functioning correctly, it puts stress on the body."

She smiles as she remembers her diagnosis of atrial fibrillation in a patient whose psoriasis had become severe after years in a controlled state. She called his cardiologist to report her findings. "He said, 'I didn't know a dermatologist owned a stethoscope!' He couldn't believe I knew what atrial fibrillation was."

Psoriasis is a chronic, genetic disease of the immune system that appears on the skin, affecting as many as 7.5 million Americans. The National Psoriasis Foundation recently named Boh to its medical board to advise the foundation on medical issues related to psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis. She directs the research symposium for the National Psoriasis Foundation and is deputy editor of the foundation's magazine.

About 2 to 3 percent of the population copes with the condition. "It's a tremendously uncomfortable disease," she says. "Patients can be itchy from head to toe." There is no cure, but, with treatment, some patients remain symptom-free for years.

Then things can change. "Psoriasis can be totally stable, and out of the blue it becomes totally unstable," she explains. "Maybe psoriasis patches are just on elbows or knees for years, but now 80 percent of the body is covered â?| we have to think about what triggered it."

Boh and her team have found undiagnosed prostate cancer, breast cancer or lung cancer in some of their patients. The [dermatology department](#) has six to 10 clinical research studies under way at any given time.

The original story by Diana Pinckley from which this was extracted was published in the summer issue of [Tulane Medicine](#) magazine.