History of Mohs Surgery

Mohs Micrographic Surgery is named after its founder and originator, Frederic E. Mohs, MD (1910-2002).
History of Mohs Surgery

As a medical student from 1929 to 1934, Dr. Mohs conducted cancer research projects while working for Dr. Michael Guyer, who was familiar with the preparation of frozen tissue for microscopic slides and focused on the need for examining, drawing and documenting discoveries that were made with the microscope.

These practices were later used by Dr. Mohs to map and excise cancer with the shave technique, which removed cancer as a thin disc of tissue so that the tumor and the inflammatory white-cell infiltrate surrounding the cancer could be examined with the microscope.
History of Mohs Surgery

After finishing medical school Dr. Mohs began his practice in a one-room clinic at the Wisconsin General Hospital in Madison, Wisconsin. This first Mohs lab consisted of a student desk with a freezing microtome and a staining setup. Sections were processed in the same room where the surgeries were performed. Surgical pathologists and their residents processed the slides for Dr. Mohs, and if a nurse was needed, Dr. Mohs would borrow one from the emergency room.

On June 30, 1936, Dr. Mohs treated his first patient, an individual with a squamous cell cancer of the lower lip.
History of Mohs Surgery

After spending four years studying refining and perfecting his procedure, Dr. Mohs expanded his practice in 1940.

Since his procedure involved more surgery than dermatology, his clinic was transferred to the department of surgery.

As time went by and the number of patients grew, so too did the amount of tissue for processing. Dr. Mohs placed a high priority on having good quality slides done in an expeditious manner.
History of Mohs Surgery

The Mohs technician who is usually identified with Dr. Mohs is Bob Patnaude. Bob worked from 1946 until his retirement in 1985.

His job entailed assisting Dr. Mohs with his surgeries, many of which were in-house. At the time, walk-in patients were treated in the morning and afterwards, the larger in-house cases were done.
History of Mohs Surgery

In 1953, Dr. Mohs accidentally performed a fresh tissue excision on a lower eyelid and was surprised with the excellent results. After this, he began to use fresh tissue excision for all his eyelid margin cases, as well as for small discrete cancers in other locations.

After Dr. Theodore Tromovitch's paper detailing microscopically controlled excision with fresh unfixed tissue was published, Dr. Mohs and most other chemosurgeons of the day began to use the fresh tissue technique almost exclusively.

Patients were the primary beneficiaries of this change because they could now have their surgeries and closures in one visit on the same day, allowing for immediate reconstruction of the wound. This change eventually brought about a name change from Chemosurgery to Mohs (Micrographic) Surgery.
In the 1970s cryostats were developed to assist the process of freezing live tissue for examination under a microscope. Automatic tissue staining machines were added in the 1980s to assist clinics with the growing number of patients and tissue samples.

Throughout all technical improvements in devises and refinements of technique, the focal point—the color-coded mapping of excised specimens and their thorough microscopic examination—remains the defining part of the Mohs Micrographic Surgery to this day.
History of the ACMS

The present day ACMS was founded in 1967 by Dr. Mohs as the American College of Chemosurgery. Through the ensuing years, the Mohs Micrographic surgical process was refined and in 1988 the membership changed the name to the American College of Mohs Micrographic Surgery and Cutaneous Oncology, noting the full spectrum of their work.

The membership voted on the 40th anniversary of the College in 2007 to shorten the name to, American College of Mohs Surgery (ACMS), to make it more user-friendly to the general public.
American College of Chemosurgery
First Annual Meeting
December 1967
Palmer House Chicago, IL


Sitting: Richard Moraites, Ray Allington, George Vavruska, Frederic Mohs, Paul Hirsch, Halina Milgrom, James Brock, Nicholas Gimbel, Gerald Peters