International Board Certification in Dermatopathology:
A worldwide effort to rise standards in dermatopathology

Helmut Kerl, Lorenzo Cerroni, Günter Burg,
Rino Cerio, Harald Gollnick, Heinz Kutzner, Omar Sangueza

Correspondence:
Helmut Kerl, MD
Department of Dermatology
Medical University of Graz
Auenbruggerplatz, 8
A-8036 Graz
Austria
Ph.: (+43-316) 385-2538
Fax: (+43-316) 385-3424
e-mail: helmut.kerl@meduni-graz.at
On December 11, 2004, the second **Certifying Examination in Dermatopathology** (Diploma of Dermatopathology), organized by the **International Board of Dermatopathology** under the auspices of the **International Committee for Dermatopathology**, was held in Frankfurt/Main, Germany. The examination was sponsored by the International Society of Dermatopathology, the European Society for Dermatopathology, and the Ibero-Latin-American Society of Dermatopathology, and was open to dermatologists and pathologists from all countries in the world. The International Board of Dermatopathology (Fig. 1) was chaired by Helmut Kerl (Graz, Austria; President, International Committee for Dermatopathology), and included Günter Burg (Zurich, Switzerland; General Secretary, International Committee for Dermatopathology), Rino Cerio (London, United Kingdom; President, European Society for Dermatopathology), Lorenzo Cerroni (Graz, Austria; President, Austrian Society of Dermatopathology; Past-President, International Society of Dermatopathology), Bernard Cribier (Strasbourg, France; Secretary, European Society for Dermatopathology), Harald Gollnick (Magdeburg, Germany; President, Union Européenne des Médecins Spécialistes (UEMS) - Section of Dermatology and Venereology; President, German Society of Dermatology), Philip E. LeBoit (San Francisco, USA; Editor-in-Chief, *The American Journal of Dermatopathology*), Omar Sangueza (Winston-Salem, USA; President, International Society of Dermatopathology; President, Ibero-Latin-American Society of Dermatopathology), Heinz Kutzner (Representative for Dermatopathology of the German League of Dermatology), and Bruce R. Smoller (Little Rock, USA; Past-President, American Society of Dermatopathology). Maureen Walsh (Belfast, Northern Ireland; Chief Examiner for the Diploma in Dermatopathology of the Royal College of Pathologists, United Kingdom) and Dirk Ruiter (Nijmegen, the Netherlands; President, Union Européenne des Médecins Spécialistes (UEMS) - Section of Pathology) were present as representatives of the Royal College of Pathologists (United Kingdom) and of the UEMS-Section of Pathology, respectively. Once again, Roland Kaufmann and especially Manfred Wolter took care of the local organization providing the venue, the microscopes, and particularly the very friendly atmosphere which characterized the event.
Thirty-four candidates (Figure 2) from fifteen different countries (Belgium: 7; Germany: 6; Italy: 3; United Kingdom: 3; Austria: 2; Hungary: 2; Spain: 2; USA: 2; France: 1; Iran: 1; Israel: 1; the Netherlands: 1; Portugal: 1; Saudi Arabia: 1; South Korea: 1) gathered in Frankfurt to sit for the examination, which was structured in three main parts. The first consisted of 56 written questions (Table 1), followed by the second part in which 28 pictures (immunohistological or clinical pictures) were projected on a screen (Figures 3, 4). In the last part 70 histopathologic sections of inflammatory and neoplastic skin conditions were reviewed (Figures 5, 6). The examination was based on multiple-choice or short-answer questions and lasted the whole day (from 9 am to 5.30 pm), with a short interruption for lunch.

The first examination in Frankfurt in 2003 was a milestone in the history of Dermatopathology in Europe and, indeed, worldwide. For the first time on the "old continent" there has been an attempt to rise the standards of Dermatopathology with the assessment of individual competence on the basis of a formal examination. In addition, for the first time such an examination was not limited to members of a specific medical society and/or of a given country, but was open to every dermatologist and pathologist worldwide (with the proviso that specific requirements concerning training in dermatopathology were fulfilled). In other words, not only was the aim of the examination to rise the level of quality in dermatopathology, but it also was without boundaries, thus being one of the first attempts of an "International Certification" in the history of Medicine. This was also reflected in the composition of the Examination Committee, which included the leading persons of most international Dermatopathology Societies worldwide. The second examination in Frankfurt in 2004 was structured in a similar fashion. The high number of candidates coming from so many disparate countries in Europe, North America, the Middle-East and Asia clearly confirmed both the need for and the international nature of the examination.

The vast majority of the candidates identified Frankfurt as an optimal location for the examination and found the structure of the examination itself adequate.

For the future, in most countries of the world many important goals are left to be achieved:

1) The need for full-time professional dermatopathologists with special expertise and without any other obligations. In most countries of the world,
dermatopathology is not performed on a full-time basis but rather by dermatologists or pathologists who spend only a limited amount of time doing it, thus lacking the necessary experience.

2) The introduction of a curriculum for specialty training in dermatopathology. At present, such a curriculum is available only in a few countries.

3) The identification of training centers and the establishment of regulations for accreditation of training programs. Dermatopathology should be trained at a high level of quality in centers with vast experience and teaching facilities. Unfortunately precise regulations for the identification of training centers are lacking in most countries.

4) The development of a program for residency education in dermatopathology (both in dermatology and pathology residency programs). All residents in dermatology or pathology should be trained in dermatopathology during their residency.

5) The layout of an economic basis for dermatopathology. With the exception of a few countries such as the USA and Germany, students in dermatopathology are denied professional opportunities outside academic centers. Especially residents in dermatology are attracted therefore by more rewarding subspecialties.

6) The arrangement of an academic basis for dermatopathology. At present, in many countries of the world those practicing dermatopathology at academic centers are denied possibilities of high academic careers. The introduction of Departments for Dermatopathology would clearly improve the academic backgrounds of dermatopathology in Europe and other countries of the world, in the same way as it did in the United States.

The third International Board Certification in Dermatopathology will be organized on December 10, 2005, in Frankfurt/Main, Germany (www.icdpath.org).
References

1) Kerl H, Cerroni L, Burg G, Cerio R, Gollnick H, Smoller BR. International Board Certification in Dermatopathology: paving the way for the future. Published in:
   J Cut Pathol 2004;31:683-685
   JDDG 2004;2:476-477


**Table.** Two examples of the Examination, Part 1 (written part, multiple choice).

Question 25: Bullous impetigo (impetigo contagiosa) may show a histologic pattern similar to:

- A) Pemphigus foliaceus
- B) Lichen planus pemphigoides
- C) Dermatitis herpetiformis Duhring
- D) Bullous systemic lupus erythematous

Question 48: The second most powerful histologic prognostic indicator (AJCC-criteria) in patients with stages I and II melanoma is:

- A) Breslow thickness
- B) Mitotic rate
- C) Ulceration
- D) Regression

Correct answers: Q25: A (33/34 candidates gave the correct answer)
Q48: C (25/34 candidates gave the correct answer)
Figure Legends

Fig. 1. Members of the International Board of Dermatopathology present in Frankfurt in 2004. From left to right: L. Cerroni, H. Kutzner, H. Kerl, H. Gollnick, Maureen Walsh (Chief Examiner for the Diploma in Dermatopathology of the Royal College of Pathologists), R. Kaufmann (Chairman, Department of Dermatology, University of Frankfurt/M.), G. Burg, O. Sangueza, M. Wolter (local organization).

Fig. 2. International Board Certification in Dermatopathology 2004. 34 Candidates from 15 countries came to Frankfurt.
Fig. 3. Examination, Part 2 (pictures). The question was: The pagetoid cells in this lesion from the genital region are identified by:

A) Cytokeratin 5  
B) Cytokeratin 7  
C) Cytokeratin 20  
D) Cytokeratin 10  

The correct answer (B) was given by 28/34 candidates.

Fig. 4. Examination, part 2 (pictures). The question was: Name the clinical diagnosis.  
The correct answer (lupus erythematosus) was given by 33/34 candidates.
**Fig. 5 a + b.** Examination, Part 3 (histopathologic slides). The question was: 45 year-old woman. Multiple papules and small nodules especially on both legs.

A) Drug eruption  
B) Lymphomatoid papulosis  
C) Histiocytosis X  
D) Persistent scabies

The correct answer (B) was given by 33/34 candidates.

**Fig. 6 a + b.** Examination, Part 3 (histopathologic slides). The question was: 8 year-old girl. Sudden onset of erythematous papules on the trunk.

The correct answer (pityriasis lichenoides et varioliformis acuta) was given by 22/34 candidates.