Dermatology by its very nature has always had a focus on surgery. We see a lesion on the skin, we diagnose it (or don’t diagnose it) and then we cut it out. Over the years, by the sheer volume of procedures they perform, both invasive and non-invasive, dermatologists have become proficient surgeons. Indeed, Mohs surgery and most skin procedures were dermatologically conceived.

For the most part, I am a curettage, simple ellipse, with a dose of Botox, fillers and laser type of guy. This style is what I learned and was taught in my training, and it is what I have continued to use and become proficient at over the years. However, our current training programs, and quite rightly so, are increasingly teaching students and exposing them to more complex surgical removal methods and techniques. We are lucky to have exceptional surgical teachers who have produced many excellent dermatologic surgeons over the years.

But whoa, whoa, whoa—what are we talking about?! The Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons does not recognize dermatologists as surgeons! You are not “allowed” to call yourself a dermatologic surgeon, nor put it on your letterhead, business cards, or anything else. So what are we doing when we cut out a basal cell carcinoma—what would you call that? Are we just correcting the skin or are we doing surgery?!

The plastic surgeon would call it surgery but we have to call it something else.

We at the CDA need to continue lobbying the Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons to recognize the fact that our specialty is a dual one—both medical and surgical.

But I digress, so let me get back to my original point.

Dermatology has seen a large number of innovations over the years. We are now able to better help our patients with increased efficiency and increased cosmesis, with fewer complications and using less invasive methods. And part of what has helped us to deliver improved care and outcomes is our surgical skills, both traditional and innovative techniques we have added to our dermatology arsenal over time.

In this issue of the CDA eBulletin, several Canadian dermatologists will weigh in on the topic of ‘dermatologic therapy/surgery’ for your own reflection, so keep reading.