Using Descriptive Terminology in the

Oral Medical Evaluation and Head & Neck Examination

Primary lesions (originating from previously normal skin)

- **Type**: Macule
  - Description: Flat, discolored spot on skin with sharp borders
  - Example: Freckle

- **Type**: Papule
  - Description: Solid elevations without fluid with sharp borders
  - Example: Mole

- **Type**: Nodule, tumor
  - Description: Palpable, solid, elevated mass
  - Example: Wart (nodule)
  - Example: Large lipoma (tumor)

- **Type**: Vesicle
  - Description: Small distinct elevation with fluid
  - Example: Blister caused by herpes simplex

- **Type**: Bulla
  - Description: Large distinct elevation with fluid
  - Example: Large friction or burn blister

- **Type**: Pustule
  - Description: Vesicle or bulla filled with purulent fluid
  - Example: Acne, carbuncles

- **Type**: Wheal
  - Description: Localized area of edema, often irregular and of variable size and color
  - Example: Hive, insect bite

- **Type**: Plaque
  - Description: Larger, flat, elevated, solid surface
  - Example: Psoriasis

Secondary lesions (originating from a primary lesion)

- **Type**: Scale
  - Description: Thin or thick flake of skin varying in color; usually secondary to desquamated, dead epithelium
  - Example: Dandruff

- **Type**: Crust
  - Description: Dried residue of exudates
  - Example: Residue of impetigo

- **Type**: Fissure
  - Description: Linear crack in the skin
  - Example: Athlete’s foot

- **Type**: Ulcer
  - Description: Opening in the skin caused by sloughing of necrotic tissue, extending past the epithelmis
  - Example: Pressure ulcer, stasis ulcer

When describing a mucosal lesion, it is important to note the following features:

- **Type** (above terminology)
- **Size** (measure with a periodontal probe in two dimensions)
- **Shape and symmetry**
- **Color and pigmentation** (red, white, purple, brown, grey, etc.)
- **Surface features** (smooth, rough, etc.)
- **Distribution over the tissue** (location; diffuse or demarcated)
- **Findings on palpation** (superficial, deep, movable, fixed, tender, etc.)