Color correcting – for skin blemishes

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One of the most frustrating problems we encounter is helping patients with skin issues that we cannot immediately fix or cure. Teaching them the art of concealing skin blemishes gives patients a sense of relief. Color correction is an art and requires an understanding of basic color theory and Fitzpatrick skin type.

On the color wheel, each color sits directly across from another color, making them complementary colors.

![Color Wheel Diagram](image-url)
If we look at red, the color opposing it is green. When red and green are combined, they neutralize each other. One of the greatest dermatologists of all time and my mentor, Timothy Berger, MD, taught me that in dermatology color “hue” is a clue to understanding morphology. Everything that is red cannot just be called “erythematous.” There is orange/red (pityriasis rosea, tinea versicolor, seborrheic dermatitis), deep red (cellulitis, Sweet’s syndrome, acne scars, rosacea, psoriasis), purple/red (vasculitis, lichen planus (LP), veins, under-eye circles), brown/red (pigmented purpura, pigmented acne scars, sarcoid).

The combination of the underlying pathology, morphology, and Fitzpatrick type is both a clue to diagnosis and a pallet for skin concealers. We can use the following techniques to help patients color correct skin imperfections:

**Dr. Lily Talakoub**

**Red: rosacea, acne scars, acne**

Green-based concealers and primers are the best option to significantly reduce the redness. While green primers and correctors tend to be great for Fitzpatrick skin types I-III, a yellow-based concealer/corrector can help to cover redness on those with skin types IV-VI.

**Blue: periorbital veins**
If you are dealing with blue-toned skin lesions, such as periorbital veins, the ideal corrector is one with a peach or orange undertones. For skin types I-III, a peach/salmon corrector works best, whereas skin types IV-VI requires an orange-toned corrector.

**Purple: under-eye circles, LP, postprocedure bruising**

If under-eye circles tend to have a more purple hue to them, a yellow-based corrector works best for skin types I-III. For skin types IV-VI skin types, you will need a corrector with a red undertone.

**Yellow: bruising**

Purple/lavender correctors are best suited for eliminating yellow tones from the face. Purple also combats sallow undertones of the skin.

**Brown: lentigines, melasma, seborrheic keratosis, post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation, nevi, café au lait spots**

Dr. Naissan O. Wesley

Brown is actually the hardest of all colors to correct. The deeper the pigment (ashy dermatitis, melasma) the more gray the areas appear with skin concealers. The more superficial the pigment (ephelides, lentigines), the easier it is to correct. Generally speaking, peach toned concealers work best, not beige or brown. The corrector, however, should be lighter than the skin tone or the lesion itself will appear darker.
Helping patients conceal imperfections with these simple guidelines is a great way to help relieve some anxiety and help our patients feel more confident in their skin.

Dr. Talakoub and Dr. Wesley are co-contributors to this column. Dr. Talakoub is in private practice in McLean, Va. Dr. Wesley practices dermatology in Beverly Hills, Calif. This month’s column is by Dr. Talakoub. Write to them at dermnews@frontlinemedcom.com.