

Dr. Katrina Abuabara

Provider, Researcher

"We've come a long way in our understanding of eczema. We used to think of it as just a skin disease, but now we think of it as a systemic condition that can impact other aspects of health. That's leading to a real transition in the treatment paradigm."

- Katrina Abuabara, MD, MSCE

Katrina Abuabara, MD, MSCE, is a dermatologist and researcher in the Department of Dermatology at the University of California San Francisco and an Associate Adjunct Professor, at the University of California Berkeley School of Public Health. She studies the impact of inflammatory skin disease on overall health and the role of the skin in the aging process. Though she did not expect to end up in dermatology—her background is in public health—she was drawn to the opportunity to study how genetic, environmental, and social factors impact the skin in such a visible, accessible way.

Because there are no consistent measures of skin physiology that show up in medical records after each visit (like, for example, blood pressure or labs do), researchers like Dr. Abuabara must find other ways to try and understand the population basis and natural progression of eczema. "While genetics has taught us a lot about the skin barrier and immune dysregulation" she reasons, "figuring out what triggers immune dysregulation is still a work in progress."

Not every patient has the same immune profile; therefore, not every treatment will work the same for each patient. They may not even work the same way in the same patient at different stages of progression or at other times in their life. Dr. Abuabara's research focuses on trying to understand this heterogeneity. She is hoping to learn more about the differences in immune profiles – [particularly among adults](#), whose rates of eczema are increasing – to improve understanding of which treatments will work best in which patients.

What adds to the complexity of this research is that eczema is, by its nature, a fluctuating condition. While some other diseases look to progression as an endpoint, eczema has flares and calms, making it trickier to study. Understanding it requires a longitudinal approach with longitudinal data that captures both activity and severity over time as well as environmental influences.

"It's important that policymakers acknowledge the significance of quality of life for patients with eczema. It is not a condition that can be measured in morbidity and mortality alone. Even when we have great drugs that we know work well for certain patients, if we don't invest in understanding why they aren't working for others – and what might work better – people will continue to suffer."