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의학박사 학위논문

Uncovering a new risk factor for  
subungual melanoma:  
Clinicopathological profiles with  
cadaveric study on the nail apparatus

조갑하 흑색종의 새로운 위험인자 규명:  
병리임상학적 고찰 및 조갑부위 해부학적 연구

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A Thesis of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Uncovering a new risk factor for  
subungual melanoma:  
Clinicopathological profiles with  
cadaveric study on the nail apparatus

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# **Abstract**

## **Background**

Subungual melanoma (SUM) is a rare subtype of melanoma originating from the melanocytes in the nail matrix. Recently, there is growing attention toward a more conservative functional surgery in order to escape functional deficit from amputation. However, the consensus on the surgical treatment is still controversial. Also, progression of SUM and correlation with clinical outcomes remain unclear.

## **Objective**

The purpose of the present study was to provide objective measurements by analyzing the anatomy of the nail apparatus and to identify the pattern of dermal invasion in different locations of the nail bed with its relationship with clinical prognosis.

## **Methods & Materials**

The nailbed was divided into 5 subunits; hyponychium (H), sterile matrix (SM), germinal matrix (GM), ventral floor of proximal nail fold (VFPNF), and dorsal roof of proximal nail fold (DRPNF). From 21 cadavers, nailbed thickness was measured in 5 landmark points. Microvessel and lymphatic density was histologically measured in each subunit. Retrospective data from 44 SUM cases between January 2011 and April 2019 were reviewed regarding invasion pattern in each subunit histopathologically, correlating with clinical outcomes to assess risk factors.

## Results

The nailbed thickness was the thinnest at the most proximal point of the nail matrix (thumbs,  $1.10 \pm 0.42$  mm; big toes,  $1.15 \pm 0.37$  mm) and the thickest at the hyponychium (thumbs,  $2.86 \pm 0.82$  mm; big toes,  $2.72 \pm 0.84$  mm). The median microvessel and lymphatics density was the highest at the hyponychium ( $25.74$  vessels/mm<sup>2</sup>,  $7.55$  vessels/mm<sup>2</sup>) and lowest at the germinal matrix ( $16.26$  vessels/mm<sup>2</sup>,  $4.14$  vessels/mm<sup>2</sup>), respectively ( $p < 0.05$ ). Dermal invasion of SUM was shown mostly in the distal areas of nail apparatus, with 11, 30, 18, 7, and 4 in the H, SM, GM, VFPNF, and DRPNF, respectively. The patients with hyponychial invasion showed a significantly greater Breslow depth ( $p = 0.009$ ), higher rate of lymph node metastasis ( $p = 0.019$ ), distant metastasis ( $p = 0.036$ ), and shorter disease-free survival ( $p = 0.001$ ).

## Conclusion

Nailbed thickness is the thinnest at the proximal nail matrix, and the thickest at the hyponychium. Microvessel or lymphatic density was highest at the hyponychium. Hyponychial invasion is an important prognostic predictor of SUM, given its strong association with invasion depth, metastatic progression, and disease-free survival. Patients with invasion in the hyponychium should undergo stricter workup, treatment, and surveillance.

**Keywords:** malignant melanoma, nail melanoma, risk factors, functional surgery, prognosis

**Student Number:** 2014-30649

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# Chapter 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Study Background

Subungual melanoma (SUM) is a rare form of malignant melanoma that originates from the melanocytes in the nail matrix, comprising 0.7–3.5% of all melanoma subtypes [1–9]. At the early stage, subungual melanoma may only feature longitudinal dark pigmentation under the nail and is frequently misdiagnosed as other diseases such as striate melanonychia and onychomycosis. Approximately 15% to 65% of subungual melanomas are known to be amelanotic, which delays the patients in seeking medical advice [10, 11]. Thus, a diagnosis of subungual melanoma is commonly delayed, and most of the times, the disease is diagnosed at an advanced stage.

Historically, many patients with diagnostic delay had to undergo aggressive treatment to obtain clear safety margins [7, 8]. Radical amputation was recommended as Das Gupta *et al.* reported that any resection distal to the metacarpophalangeal joints increased the local recurrence and decreased survival [12]. However, because of the great functional loss and cosmetic defects caused by amputation, more conservative surgical approaches have been accepted by many surgeons recently. Park *et al.*, in their review of 100 cases of SUM, found no difference in the survival of patients treated with local proximal interphalangeal joint amputation compared with those

with more proximal amputations [13]. In a retrospective review of 124 cases, Nguyen *et al.* concluded that the resection level does not influence outcomes if histologically free margins are obtained [14]. The most recent meta-analyses suggested that amputation was not significantly beneficial in terms of prognosis and survival over more conservative treatments in early lesions [15, 16].

Despite the increasing trend towards non-amputative surgeries, the proper treatment remains controversial regarding the requirement for amputation, level of amputation, or resection margin and depth during functional surgery [2]. In order to determine whether to perform amputation or to delineate an exact excision margin during functional surgery, the knowledge of normal nailbed anatomy and the pattern of tumor invasion in SUM is essential.

Previously, there have been a few cadaveric studies, evaluating the anatomy of the nail apparatus [17, 18]. However, these studies did not measure the distances between multiple anatomical structures of the nail apparatus, and therefore, did not fully provide the information essential to achieve a safe resection margins. With insufficient anatomical knowledge, precise surgical planning is challenging. Further, very little is known about the sequence of development of SUM. There is a strong evidence that SUM originates from the proximal germinal matrix and grows in radial direction in early stages, with dermal invasion occurring at more advanced stages [19–23]. However, sufficient evidences have not been provided to elucidate the dermal invasion pattern, and the

correlation between the disease progression and clinical outcomes.

## **1.2. Purpose of Research**

In this study, we collected specimens from 21 cadavers and performed a histological analysis including nailbed thickness, microvessel density (MVD), and lymphatic density (LD) according to the nail subunit. In order to investigate invasion pattern of SUM in relation with clinical outcomes, dermal invasion in each subunit of the nail apparatus was reviewed pathologically. Also, its relationship with prognostic findings was evaluated, such as local recurrence, lymph node metastasis, and distant metastasis. This will help us to understand the invasion pattern of SUM associated with unique anatomical structure of the nailbed. Pattern of tumor invasion gives us essential information in delineating resection margin during functional surgery. Further, correlation between the disease progression and clinical outcomes will provide a new risk factor of SUM, as well as giving us clues to establish a modified staging system for SUM.

# Chapter 2. Body

## Materials and methods

### 2.1 Cadaveric anatomical study

#### 2.1.1 Subject selection

Specimens were obtained from 21 cadavers, and those that were inappropriately processed were excluded, resulting in a total of 55 specimens (thumbs, 27; big toes, 28). Two cadavers were female and the rest were male. The age at death ranged between 49 and 91 years, with the average age being 71.5 years. Among the 55 specimens, 13 were of the right thumb; 14, left thumb; 14, right big toe; and 14, left big toe. No specimens had a history of trauma or disease on the digit involved.

#### 2.1.2 Histological analysis

The specimens were cut along the longitudinal midline in 10 $\mu$ m thick sections. Hematoxylin and Eosin (H&E) staining was performed for cross-sectional analysis. Eleven landmarks were selected as shown in figure 1 as follows. M, most proximal point of nail matrix; B1, bony cortex closest to point M; B2, bony cortex closest to S2; B3, bony cortex closest to S3; B4, processus unguicularis; B5, bony cortex closest to S5; S1, surface of skin closest to M; S2, eponychium; S3, surface midpoint of S2 and S4; S4, surface of nailbed at B4; and S5, Hyponychium. The vertical distance of the nailbed was measured at multiple sites using ImageScope<sup>TM</sup> (Aperio Technologies, Inc., Vista, CA).

### 27 2.1.3 Immunohistochemical staining and calculation of MVD and LD

28 Along with the H&E-stained slides, 16 additional slides were labeled using  
29 CD31 and D2-40 antibodies to evaluate MVD and LD, respectively. Two slides  
30 were discarded because of inadequate staining. Subsequently, the stained slides  
31 were scanned using Aperio ScanScope® CS instrument (Aperio Technologies, Inc.,  
32 Vista, CA) at  $\times 400$  magnification. Following this, the slides were analyzed with  
33 ImageScope™ using the Microvessel Analysis v1 algorithm (Aperio Technologies,  
34 Inc., Vista, CA). The algorithm counted vessels within the area range of 50  $\mu\text{m}$  to  
35 200,000  $\mu\text{m}$ . In each slide, the nail apparatus was divided into five different  
36 subunits: hyponychium (H), sterile matrix (SM), germinal matrix (GM), ventral  
37 floor of proximal nail fold (VFPNF), and dorsal roof of proximal nail fold (DRPNF)  
38 [24]. The subunit H is the distal free margin of the nail, which unlike the nailbed,  
39 comprises the stratum granulosum layer [25]. The SM subunit includes nail matrix  
40 distal to the lunula and proximal to subunit H. GM is the portion of the nail matrix  
41 underlying the lunula. From the eponychium, the proximal nail fold forms a blind  
42 pocket encasing the nail plate. The ventral portion of the pocket indicates the  
43 VFPNF, and DRPNF is the dorsal skin layer of the pocket. The MVD and LD of  
44 each subunit was calculated by dividing the microvessel count (number) by the  
45 area of the particular subunit ( $\text{mm}^2$ ).

46

### 47 2.1.4 Statistical analysis

48 For MVD and LD according to its nail subunit, normality test was performed  
49 using SPSS version 26.0 (IBM, Armonk, NY). Because the data did not meet the  
50 assumption of normality, Kruskal-Wallis test was performed to determine if there  
51 were significant differences between MVDs or LDs calculated according to the nail  
52 subunits. Following this, Wilcoxon Mann-Whitney test was performed as a *post hoc*  
53 test to confirm whether the data collection was statistically significant.

54

55

## 2.2 Pathologic evaluation with clinical prognosis

56

### 2.2.1. Study design

58 A retrospective review was performed of 60 surgically-treated patients who  
59 were diagnosed with malignant melanoma in the fingers or toes between January  
60 2011 and April 2019. Nine patients diagnosed as non-subungual melanoma and 7  
61 patients without available pathologic specimen were excluded. A final of 44 patients  
62 were incorporated in the study, including 24 pathologically diagnosed from outside  
63 clinics and 20 diagnosed at our hospital. The biopsy methods used for diagnosis  
64 included punch biopsy in 30 patients, wedge biopsy in 3, tangential biopsy in 4, and  
65 excisional biopsy in 7. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board  
66 (reference: H-2004-132-1117) and was performed in accordance with the  
67 recommendations of the Declaration of Helsinki for biomedical research involving  
68 human subjects.

69

### 2.2.2. Histopathological analysis

71 The slides of 44 SUM cases stained by HE were reviewed by two pathologists.  
72 The specimens were obtained in sagittal, longitudinal 4mm-interval sections. The  
73 nail plate was decalcified prior to the slide production to smooth the hard tissue  
74 such as the nail plate and underlying bone. The slide which showed the deepest  
75 invasion was chosen in order to analyze dermal invasion pattern of SUM. The  
76 histopathological analysis was performed according to the aforementioned five  
77 anatomical subunits of the nail apparatus; H, SM, GM, VFPNF, and DRPNF.

78 The invasion of SUM in each subunit was categorized using three criteria: no  
79 tumor, in situ, or dermal invasion. The vertical invasion was evaluated by  
80 measuring the Breslow depth at locations with the deepest invasion. To evaluate  
81 the radial invasion, the total involvement score was calculated by adding scores

82 from the five subunits, 0 as no tumor, 1 as melanoma in situ, and 2 as invasive  
83 melanoma. For example, in a patient with invasion of the H, N, and GM, but in situ  
84 in the VFPNF, and no tumor in the DRPNF, the score was calculated as 7  
85 (2+2+2+1+0=7).

86

### 87 2.2.3. Clinical analysis

88 Clinical data on demographics, clinical presentation, surgical method, follow-up  
89 period, disease-free survival, and prognostic factors including local recurrence,  
90 lymph node metastasis, and distant metastasis were obtained from the electronic  
91 medical records. The high-risk group was defined as patients who presented with  
92 local recurrence, lymph node metastasis, or distant metastasis, whereas the low-  
93 risk group was defined as patients with none of them.

94

### 95 2.2.4. Statistical analysis

96 Statistical analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Version 23.0 (IBM Corp.,  
97 Armonk, NY). The Fisher's exact test and chi-square test was used to assess  
98 the relationship between subunit invasion and clinical findings. The Mann-Whitney  
99 U test was used to compare the relationship between subunit invasion and Breslow  
100 depth, total involvement score. The Log rank test was used to evaluate the  
101 disease-free survival. The statistical significance level was set at the p-values  
102 less than 0.05.

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111 3.1.1. Vertical distances of the nail apparatus

## **Results**

### 3.1 Cadaveric anatomical study

112 The nailbed thickness was defined as the vertical distance between the nailbed  
113 surface and the underlying phalangeal bone. Among these measurements, the  
114 distance between the hyponychium and the underlying bony cortex (S5–B5) was  
115 the largest, measuring  $2.86 \pm 0.82$  mm in the thumb and  $2.72 \pm 0.84$  mm in the big  
116 toe. The distance from the eponychium to the underlying bony cortex (S2–B2)  
117 was  $1.91 \pm 0.49$  mm at the thumb and  $2.08 \pm 0.49$  mm at the big toe. The distance  
118 between the surface midpoint of S2 and S4 and the bony cortex closest to S3 (S3–  
119 B3) measured  $1.84 \pm 0.50$  mm at the thumb and  $2.40 \pm 0.58$  mm at the big toe. The  
120 distance from the surface of the nailbed at B4 to the processus unguicularis (S4–  
121 B4) was  $1.11 \pm 0.52$  mm at the thumb and  $1.40 \pm 0.58$  mm at the big toe. The  
122 shortest vertical distance was observed from the most proximal point of the nail  
123 matrix to the bony cortex (M–B1), which measured  $1.10 \pm 0.42$  mm at the thumb  
124 and  $1.15 \pm 0.37$  mm at the big toe (Table 1).

125

### 126 3.1.2. MVD and LD of nail apparatus

127 In all, 14 slides were made for MVD and LD (vessels/mm<sup>2</sup>) analysis. A  
128 representative slide is shown in figures 2 and 3, respectively. The median MVD  
129 was  $25.74 \pm 8.42$  vessels/mm<sup>2</sup> in subunit H,  $17.99 \pm 9.33$  vessels/mm<sup>2</sup> in SM,  $16.26$   
130  $\pm 3.82$  vessels/mm<sup>2</sup> in GM,  $19.88 \pm 11.07$  vessels/mm<sup>2</sup> in VFPNF, and  $18.62 \pm 6.21$   
131 vessels/mm<sup>2</sup> in DRPNF. The differences were statistically significant between MVD  
132 of subunit H and those of subunit GM ( $p < 0.05$ ) and DRPNF ( $p < 0.05$ ). No  
133 statistically significant differences were observed between other subunits. The  
134 median LD was  $7.55 \pm 3.87$  vessels/mm<sup>2</sup> in subunit H,  $5.84 \pm 3.82$  vessels/mm<sup>2</sup> in  
135 SM,  $5.18 \pm 2.67$  vessels/mm<sup>2</sup> in GM,  $5.91 \pm 2.85$  vessels/mm<sup>2</sup> in VFPNF, and  $4.14 \pm$   
136  $1.46$  vessels/mm<sup>2</sup> in DRPNF. The differences were statistically significant between  
137 LD of subunit H and those of subunit DRPNF ( $p < 0.05$ ). No statistically significant  
138 differences were observed between other subunits.

139



## 3.2 Pathologic evaluation with clinical prognosis

### 3.2.1. Patient characteristics

SUM was present in 44 cases, with an average age of 61.07 years. Thirty-four cases were diagnosed with invasive melanoma (77.3%), and 10 with melanoma in situ (22.7%). The clinical presentation was mostly total melanonychia (n=33, 75.0%), followed by longitudinal melanonychia (n=6, 13.6%), Hutchinson's sign only (n=3, 6.8%), and amelanotic lesions with nail mass or nail deformity (n=2, 4.5%). The Hutchinsons' sign was present in 36 cases (81.8%), and ulceration was present in 11 cases (25.0%). Twenty-four patients underwent amputation (54.5%) while 20 underwent functional surgeries (45.5%). Sentinel lymph node biopsy was performed in 26 cases of invasive melanoma according to the previous guideline [26], of which 3 cases were present with metastasis. During the mean follow-up period of 3.04 years, lymph node metastasis was found in 12 cases (27.3%), distant metastasis in 13 cases (29.5%), and local recurrence in 3 cases (6.8%) (Table 2).

### 3.2.2. Distribution of SUM in each nail subunit and correlation with high-risk factors

Twenty-nine patients were at low risk, while the other 15 were at high-risk. In the DRPNF, 4 patients presented with dermal invasion (9.1%) while 17 presented with in situ lesions (38.6%). In the VFPNF, 10 patients were diagnosed with invasive melanoma (22.7%) and 27 were diagnosed with melanoma in situ (61.4%). Eighteen patients had dermal invasion in the GM (40.9%) while 21 had in situ lesions (47.7%). In the SM, 30 patients showed dermal invasion (68.2%) and 11 patients showed in situ (25.0%). In the hyponychium, 11 patients were diagnosed with invasive melanoma (25.0%) while 21 were diagnosed with melanoma in situ (47.7%).

168 When the relationship between the tumor involvement at each subunit,  
169 including both melanoma in situ and invasive melanoma, and the high-risk of  
170 metastasis and recurrence was analyzed, no statistically significant correlation was  
171 found in any area of the nail apparatus. However, when we examined the  
172 correlation between tumor involvement with only dermal invasion and the high-risk  
173 group, a significantly higher risk of lymph node metastasis, distant metastasis, or  
174 local recurrence was observed in patients with dermal invasion in the hyponychium  
175 ( $p=0.028$ ) (Table 3).

176

### 177 3.2.3. Dermal invasion in the hyponychium and its correlation with 178 clinicopathological factors

179 Eleven cases included dermal invasion in the hyponychium (25.0%), 21  
180 involved in situ invasion (47.7%), and 12 had no tumor in the area (27.3%) (Table  
181 4). There was no statistically significant association with most variables, including  
182 age, sex, tumor location, Hutchinson's sign, invasion in other subunits, and  
183 operation. Amputation was performed in 8 of 11 patients with hyponychial invasion  
184 (72.7%), while only 16 of 33 patients without hyponychial invasion underwent  
185 amputation (48.5%), although the difference was not statistically significant  
186 ( $p=0.162$ ). The patients with hyponychial invasion showed a significantly higher  
187 rate of lymph node metastasis ( $p=0.045$ ) and tendency of distant metastasis  
188 ( $p=0.057$ ), but there was no statistical difference in the local recurrence  
189 ( $p=1.000$ ).

190

### 191 3.2.4. Histological landscape of invasion in each nail subunit and risk factors

192 Figure 4 illustrates the pattern of dermal invasion, categorized according to the  
193 presence of hyponychial invasion. Invasion occurred mostly in the distal portion,  
194 with 11 cases in the hyponychium, 30 in SM, 18 in GM, 7 in VFPNF, and 4 in  
195 DRPNF. The deepest invasion was frequently found in the distal areas, with 7

196 cases in the hyponychium and 21 in SM, whereas very few were found in the  
197 proximal areas. The continuity of invasion between adjacent subunits was observed,  
198 as there were few cases of invasive or in situ lesions at an isolated subunit.

199 Patients with hyponychial invasion showed a greater tendency to have lymph  
200 node metastasis and distant metastasis. In 11 cases of hyponychial invasion, lymph  
201 node metastasis was discovered in 6 (54.5%), distant metastasis in 6 (54.5%), and  
202 local recurrence in 1 (9.1%). In the 21 cases with in situ lesions in the  
203 hyponychium, 3 patients had lymph node metastasis (14.3%), 4 distant metastasis  
204 (19.0%), and no local recurrence (0.0%). In the 12 patients with no tumor in  
205 hyponychium, 3 cases were identified with lymph node metastasis (25.0%), 3 with  
206 distant metastasis (25.0%), and 2 with local recurrence (16.7%). Amputation was  
207 performed in 8 of 11 patients with hyponychial invasion (72.7%), 11 of 21 patients  
208 with in situ lesions (52.4%), and 4 of 12 patients with no tumor in the area (33.3%).  
209 The average total involvement score was 7.27 for hyponychial invasion, 6.10 for in  
210 situ, and 4.58 for cases with no tumor in the hyponychium.

211

212 3.2.5. Dermal invasion in each nail subunit and correlation with Breslow  
213 depth, total involvement score, and disease-free survival

214 Dermal invasion proximal to the hyponychium, including the SM, GM, VFPNF,  
215 and DRPNF, showed a strong correlation with higher total involvement scores  
216 ( $p < 0.001$ ), but no association with the Breslow depth. On the contrary, invasion in  
217 the hyponychium showed a statistically significant association with greater Breslow  
218 depth ( $p = 0.009$ ), but no significant association with the total involvement score.  
219 The disease-free survival was significantly shorter in patients with invasion in the  
220 hyponychium ( $p = 0.001$ ) and in SM ( $p = 0.047$ ) (figure 5).

221

222

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224

225

## Discussion

226

227       Because the tumor depth is essential for the determination of the resection  
228 margin and whether to perform sentinel lymph node biopsy, vertical distances are  
229 crucial. Accordingly, Kim *et al.* measured the shortest distance between the nail  
230 matrix and the underlying bone [17]. Their measurement values (thumb,  $0.90 \pm$   
231  $0.27$  mm; big toe,  $0.87 \pm 0.27$  mm), however, were slightly lower compared with  
232 ours (thumb,  $1.10 \pm 0.42$  mm; big toe,  $1.15 \pm 1.37$  mm); this may be because over  
233 90% (19/21) of the cadaver in our study were males, who tend to have larger sized  
234 digits, compared to only 60% (9/15) in the previous study. Additional studies have  
235 also noted that invasion of SUM may not occur adjacent to the primary location of  
236 subungual melanoma [23, 24]. Therefore, in this study, nailbed thickness was  
237 measured in each subunit to establish accurate deep surgical margins.

238       Current consensus of resection margin for the treatment of malignant  
239 melanoma is based on the NCCN guideline. Briefly, 5mm safety margin is  
240 recommended for the in situ lesions, 10mm for lesions of melanoma depth less than  
241 1mm, 10–20mm for lesions of 1.0–2.0mm, and 2.0mm safety margin for lesions of  
242 melanoma depth more than 2mm [26]. However, nailbed depth was just around  
243 1.1mm in the proximal nail matrix or processus unguicularis. Also, nailbed is  
244 located adjacent to hard tissue, between overlying nail plate and underlying  
245 phalangeal bone. The activity of melanocytes can be influenced by dynamic growth  
246 of nail plate from proximal to distal direction. These mean that conventional NCCN  
247 guideline cannot be applied for the SUM. Independent staging system or guideline  
248 for SUM should be made in the future with accumulated evidence including our data.

249       We also analyzed MVD and LD according to the nail subunit. MVD and LD were  
250 highest in subunit H. Previous studies have shown that a high MVD is associated  
251 with poor prognosis in various cancer types [27, 28]. This was also consistent in  
252 melanomas, in which MVD is associated with tumor recurrence, particularly in  
253 melanomas with tumor depths greater than 2 mm [29]. Our results may indicate

254 that once subungual melanomas infiltrate the microvessel or lymphatic-rich  
255 regions such as the hyponychium, they may become more susceptible to metastasis  
256 [30]. Therefore, we suggest that a more meticulous resection should be performed  
257 once the melanoma has invaded the hyponychium.

258 In this study, both the dermal invasion and the deepest invasion of SUM  
259 occurred mostly in the distal portion of the nail apparatus. This is consistent with  
260 previous studies on the possibility of dermal invasion starting in subunits other  
261 than the GM where tumors are known to originate from. *Shin et al.* reported that  
262 dermal invasion in SM is much less or occurs later than in other areas of the nail  
263 unit [22]. *Izumi et al.* also showed that the proliferation of tumor cells is more  
264 prominent in the hyponychium than in GM in the early stages [23]. They suggested  
265 that the invasion of dermal layer starts not in the GM but in SM or in hyponychium  
266 as the atypical melanocytes continually move in a distal direction towards the  
267 hyponychium where they accumulate at last. The lower tendency of invasion in GM  
268 can be explained by the physiologic environment of the distal direction of nail plate  
269 growth and the upward direction of cell growth to produce the nail plate, which  
270 inhibits the downward invasion.

271 However, there were few cases in our study with tumors in isolated subunits  
272 with no continuity to GM, even though SUM is known to begin from GM [20].  
273 Three patients presented with invasion in the hyponychium but no tumor in GM,  
274 and two cases presented with *in situ* in the hyponychium or SM but no involvement  
275 in GM. Such cases show the possibility that malignant proliferation of melanocytes  
276 could initiate not only in GM but also in the distal subunits such as the hyponychium.  
277 In an immunohistochemical review of the anatomic distribution of melanocytes,  
278 active melanocytes are present throughout the nail apparatus and especially active  
279 in the VFPNF and hyponychium [31]. The active melanocytes in the hyponychium  
280 could initiate malignant proliferation and spread to the adjacent areas in a proximal  
281 direction. Such an unusual case of melanoma originating from the hyponychium has

282 been reported in the literature previously [32]. Further histological studies with  
283 large samples are needed to identify the accurate mechanism of progression of  
284 SUM.

285 Among the five subunits of nail apparatus, hyponychium was the only area in  
286 which the invasion has a significant association with the high-risk group ( $p=0.028$ ),  
287 with more metastasis in lymph nodes ( $p=0.045$ ) and in distant organs ( $p=0.057$ ).  
288 The 5-year disease-free survival was significantly poorer in patients with  
289 invasion in the hyponychium ( $p<0.001$ ) and in SM ( $p=0.047$ ). The hyponychium  
290 could be vulnerable to metastatic progression because of the high density of  
291 microvessel and lymphatics and the absence of underlying bone [33], which is  
292 compatible with our cadaveric study. Hyponychial invasion also showed a strong  
293 association with greater Breslow depth ( $p=0.009$ ) but no association with the total  
294 involvement score ( $p=0.093$ ). Invasion in the hyponychium was associated with  
295 greater ulceration and vertical tumor burden regardless of the amount of radial  
296 progression, and this greater invasion depth could be correlated with poorer  
297 prognoses.

298 Although the delayed diagnosis has often resulted in the requirement for  
299 amputation traditionally [5, 7, 8, 16, 17, 34–36], conservative surgeries are  
300 equally beneficial in terms of prognosis and survival [1, 13–16, 37–47]. However,  
301 most studies are limited to case series rather than randomized controlled trials, and  
302 they lack information on tumor characteristics, including the depth at presentation,  
303 which is one of the most important prognosticators of SUM. In our study, the  
304 patients with hyponychial invasion underwent more amputation than those without,  
305 although the association was not statistically significant ( $p=0.162$ ). The higher  
306 susceptibility of invasion in the hyponychium and its strong correlation with  
307 unfavorable clinical findings, including greater tumor depth, more metastasis, and  
308 poorer disease-free survival, suggests the need for more meticulous preoperative  
309 evaluation, treatment approach, and frequent surveillance. Further well-designed

310 controlled studies are needed to propose an exact treatment guideline.

311 High-resolution imaging tools could be helpful for evaluating tumor invasion  
312 pattern, preoperatively [48–50]. Preoperative punch biopsy in the hyponychium  
313 can also provide crucial information in deciding surgical options. Staged operation  
314 for SUM could be another option. At first stage, SUM is widely excised with proper  
315 resection margin. The open wound is kept with wet dressing until permanent  
316 biopsy results come out for around two weeks. At second stage, surgeons can  
317 decide whether to proceed the reconstructive surgery, or to perform amputation,  
318 according to the invasion pattern in the hyponychium from the permanent biopsy.

319 There are limitations to our study. In comes of cadaver study, our cadavers  
320 were all of Korean origin and were mostly male (90%). A future study including  
321 specimens from more diverse ethnicities and genders may reinforce our study' s  
322 result. Also, the measurements were also performed at the very midline of the  
323 digits, which may be considered to be a limitation because we were not able to  
324 evaluate the cross-sections in different planes. Also, the number of patients with  
325 SUM were small without control group due to its retrospective nature. Serial  
326 observation of the development and progression of the disease was unavailable  
327 because of the limitations of a cross-sectional study.

328

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330

### **Chapter 3. Conclusion**

331

332 To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to combine anatomical,  
333 pathological, and clinical evaluation to assess the risk factors of SUM, and to  
334 predict the clinical course and prognosis. Nail bed thickness was measured  
335 between 1.0 and 3.0mm according to subunits, with highest microvessel and  
336 lymphatic density in the hyponychium. Also, hyponychial invasion is an important  
337 prognostic predictor of SUM because of its strong association with invasion depth,

338 metastatic progression, and disease-free survival. Robust microvessel and  
339 lymphatic densities in the hyponychium could contribute to tumor spreading and  
340 poor prognosis. Our findings will help us planning treatment, and surveillance for  
341 SUM. With more accumulated evidence of SUM, staging system and treatment  
342 guideline should be independently offered for SUM in the future.

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## Tables

476

477

478 Table 1. Nail bed thickness and surface anatomy of nail apparatus

479

Landmarks		Thumb		Big toe	
Vertical distances	M-B1	1.10±0.42	(0.90±0.27)*	1.15±0.37	(0.87±0.27)*
	S2-B2	1.91±0.49		2.08±0.49	
	S3-B3	1.84±0.50		2.40±0.58	
	S4-B4	1.11±0.52		1.40±0.58	
	S5-B5	2.86±0.82		2.72±0.84	

480 \*[17]

481

482

483 Table 2. Patient characteristics

Variables	Value (%)
<b>Number of patients</b>	44
<b>Age, year</b>	
<65	27 (61.4)
≥65	17 (38.6)
Mean ± 95% CI	61.07 ± 3.88
<b>Sex</b>	
M	23 (52.3)
F	21 (47.7)
<b>Location</b>	
Finger	26 (59.1)
Toe	18 (40.9)
Thumb/Big toe	33 (75.0)
Others	11 (25.0)
<b>Clinical presentation</b>	
Total melanonychia	33 (75.0)
Longitudinal melanonychia	6 (13.6)
Hutchinson's sign only	3 (6.8)
Amelnotic lesions	2 (4.5)
<b>Hutchinson's sign</b>	
Present	36 (81.8)
Absent	8 (18.2)
<b>Ulceration</b>	
Present	11 (25.0)
Absent	33 (75.0)
<b>Operation</b>	
Amputation	24 (54.5)
Functional surgery	20 (45.5)
<b>Sentinel lymph node biopsy</b>	
Performed	26 (59.1)
Not performed	18 (40.9)
<b>Invasion</b>	
<i>In situ</i>	10 (22.7)
Dermal invasion	34 (77.3)
<b>Lymph node metastasis</b>	
Present	14 (31.8)
Absent	30 (68.2)
<b>Distant metastasis</b>	
Present	13 (29.5)
Absent	31 (70.5)
<b>Local recurrence</b>	
Present	3 (6.8)
Absent	41 (93.2)
<b>Follow up period, yr</b>	
Mean ± SD	3.04 ± 1.79

Table 3. Distribution of SUM in each nail subunit and correlation with high risk factors

Melanoma in situ or Invasive melanoma	Low risk (%)	High risk (%)**	Total (%)	p-value	Only Invasive melanoma	Low risk (%)	High risk (%)**	Total (%)	p-value
<b>Dorsal roof of proximal nail fold</b>									
Present	16 (76.2)	5 (23.8)	21 (47.7)	0.169†	Present	3 (75.0)	1 (25.0)	4 (9.1)	1.000*
Absent	13 (56.5)	10 (43.5)	23 (52.3)		Absent	26 (65.0)	14 (35.0)	40 (90.9)	
<b>Ventral floor of proximal nail fold</b>									
Present	25 (67.6)	12 (32.4)	37 (84.1)	0.675*	Present	6 (60.0)	4 (40.0)	10 (22.7)	0.714*
Absent	4 (57.1)	3 (42.9)	7 (15.9)		Absent	23 (67.6)	11 (32.4)	34 (77.3)	
<b>Germinal matrix</b>									
Present	26 (66.7)	13 (33.3)	39 (88.6)	1.000*	Present	11 (61.1)	7 (38.9)	18 (40.9)	0.576†
Absent	3 (60.0)	2 (40.0)	5 (11.4)		Absent	18 (69.2)	8 (30.8)	26 (59.1)	
<b>Sterile matrix</b>									
Present	26 (63.4)	15 (46.6)	41 (93.2)	0.540*	Present	17 (56.7)	13 (43.3)	30 (68.2)	0.089*
Absent	3 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (6.8)		Absent	12 (85.7)	2 (14.3)	14 (31.8)	
<b>Hyponychium</b>									
Present	21 (65.6)	11 (34.4)	32 (72.7)	1.000*	Present	4 (36.4)	7 (63.6)	11 (25.0)	0.028*
Absent	8 (66.7)	4 (33.3)	12 (27.3)		Absent	25 (75.8)	8 (24.2)	33 (75.0)	
<b>Total</b>	29 (65.9)	15 (34.1)	44 (100.0)			29 (65.9)	15 (34.1)	44 (100.0)	

\* Fisher' s exact test p-value

† Chi-square test p-value

\*\* High risk : Patients with lymph node metastasis, distant metastasis, local recurrence



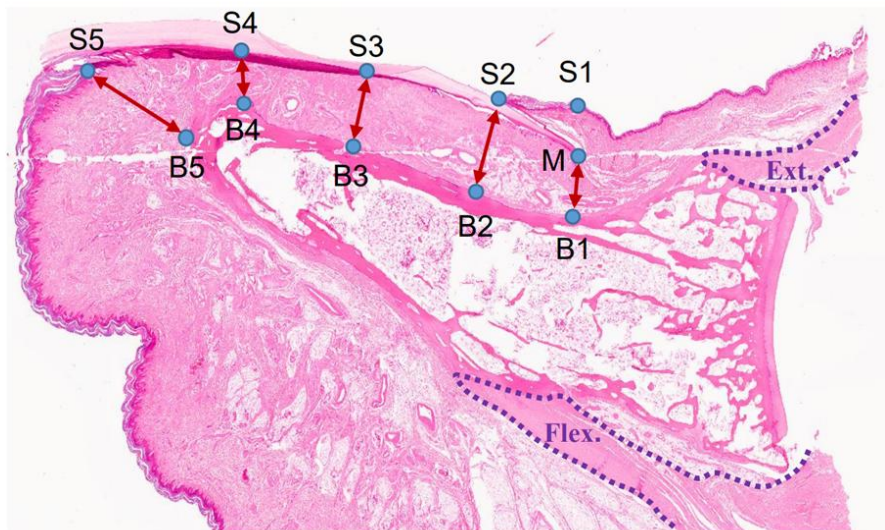
Table 4. Dermal invasion in the hyponychium and correlation with clinicopathological factors

Variables	No invasion in hyponychium (%)	Invasion in hyponychium (%)	Total (%)	p-value
<b>Age</b>				
<65yr	22 (66.7)	5 (45.5)	27 (61.4)	0.289*
≥65yr	11 (33.3)	6 (54.5)	17 (38.6)	
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	17 (51.5)	6 (54.5)	23 (52.3)	0.862†
Female	16 (48.5)	5 (45.5)	21 (47.7)	
<b>Thumb/Big toe</b>				
Thumb/Big toe	25 (75.8)	8 (72.7)	33 (75.0)	0.841†
Others	8 (24.2)	3 (27.3)	11 (25.0)	
<b>Hutchinson's sign</b>				
Present	26 (78.8)	10 (90.9)	36 (81.8)	0.367†
Absent	7 (21.2)	1 (9.1)	8 (18.2)	
<b>Invasion in DRPNF</b>				
Present	2 (6.1)	2 (18.2)	4 (9.1)	0.256*
Absent	31 (93.9)	9 (81.8)	40 (90.9)	
<b>Invasion in VFPNF</b>				
Present	6 (18.2)	4 (36.4)	10 (22.7)	0.237*
Absent	27 (81.8)	7 (63.6)	34 (77.3)	
<b>Invasion in GM</b>				
Present	13 (39.4)	5 (45.5)	18 (40.9)	0.738*
Absent	20 (60.6)	6 (54.5)	26 (59.1)	
<b>Invasion in SM</b>				
Present	21 (63.6)	9 (81.8)	30 (68.2)	0.456*
Absent	12 (36.4)	2 (18.2)	14 (31.8)	
<b>Operation</b>				
Amputation	16 (48.5)	8 (72.7)	24 (54.5)	0.162†
Functional surgery	17 (51.5)	3 (27.3)	20 (45.5)	
<b>Lymph node metastasis</b>				
Present	6 (18.2)	6 (54.5)	12 (27.3)	0.045*
Absent	27 (81.8)	5 (45.5)	32 (72.7)	
<b>Distant metastasis</b>				
Present	7 (21.2)	6 (54.5)	13 (29.5)	0.057*
Absent	26 (78.8)	5 (45.5)	31 (70.5)	
<b>Local recurrence</b>				
Present	2 (6.1)	1 (9.1)	3 (6.8)	1.000*
Absent	31 (93.9)	10 (90.9)	41 (93.2)	
<b>Total</b>	<b>33 (75.0)</b>	<b>11 (25.0)</b>	<b>44 (100.0)</b>	

DRPNF, Dorsal roof of proximal nail fold; VFPNF, Ventral floor of proximal nail fold; GM, Germinal matrix; SM, Sterile matrix

\* Fisher's exact test p-value, † Chi-square test p-value

## Figures

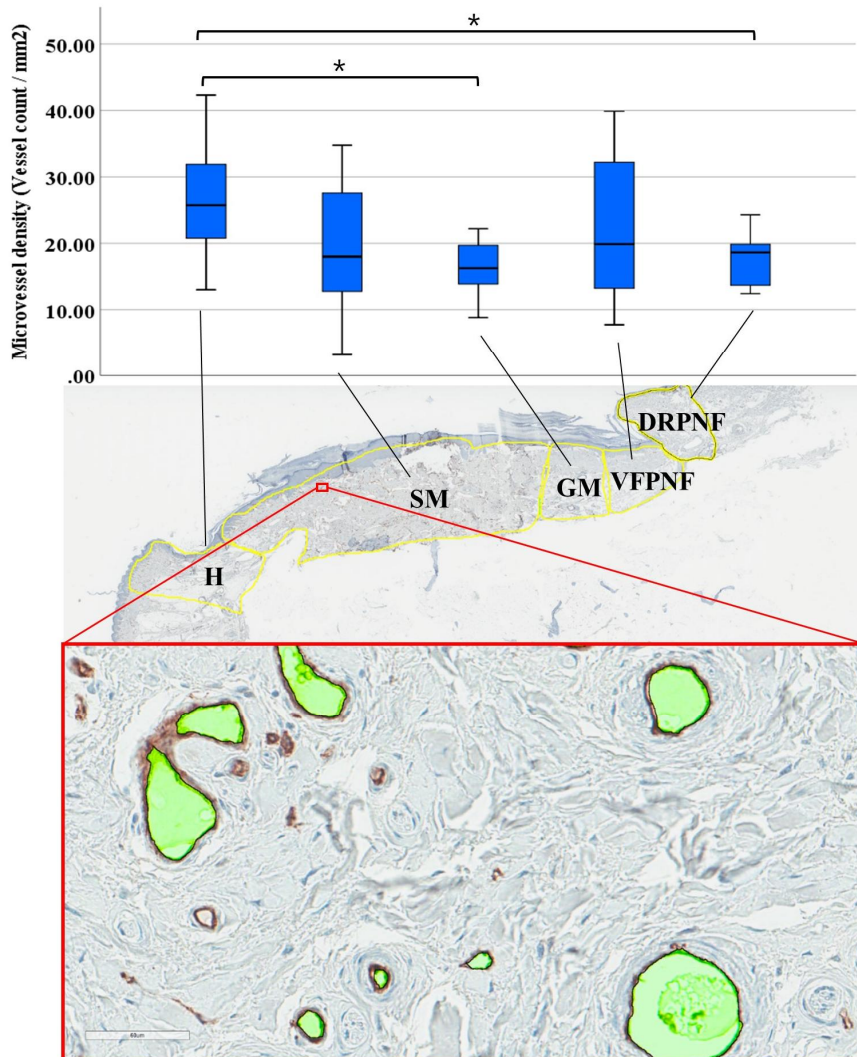


S1 : Surface of the skin closest to M  
 S2 : Eponychium  
 S3 : Surface midpoint of S2 and S4  
 S4 : Surface of nailbed at B4  
 S5 : Hyponychium  
 M : Most proximal point of nail matrix

B1 : Bony cortex closest to point M  
 B2 : Bony cortex closest to S2  
 B3 : Bony cortex closest to S3  
 B4 : Processus unguicularis  
 B5 : Bony cortex closest to S5  
 Ext. : Extensor tendon (contour marked in dotted line)  
 Flex. : Flexor tendon (contour marked in dotted line)

**Figure 1.** Cross-sectional landmarks and measured distances (mm)

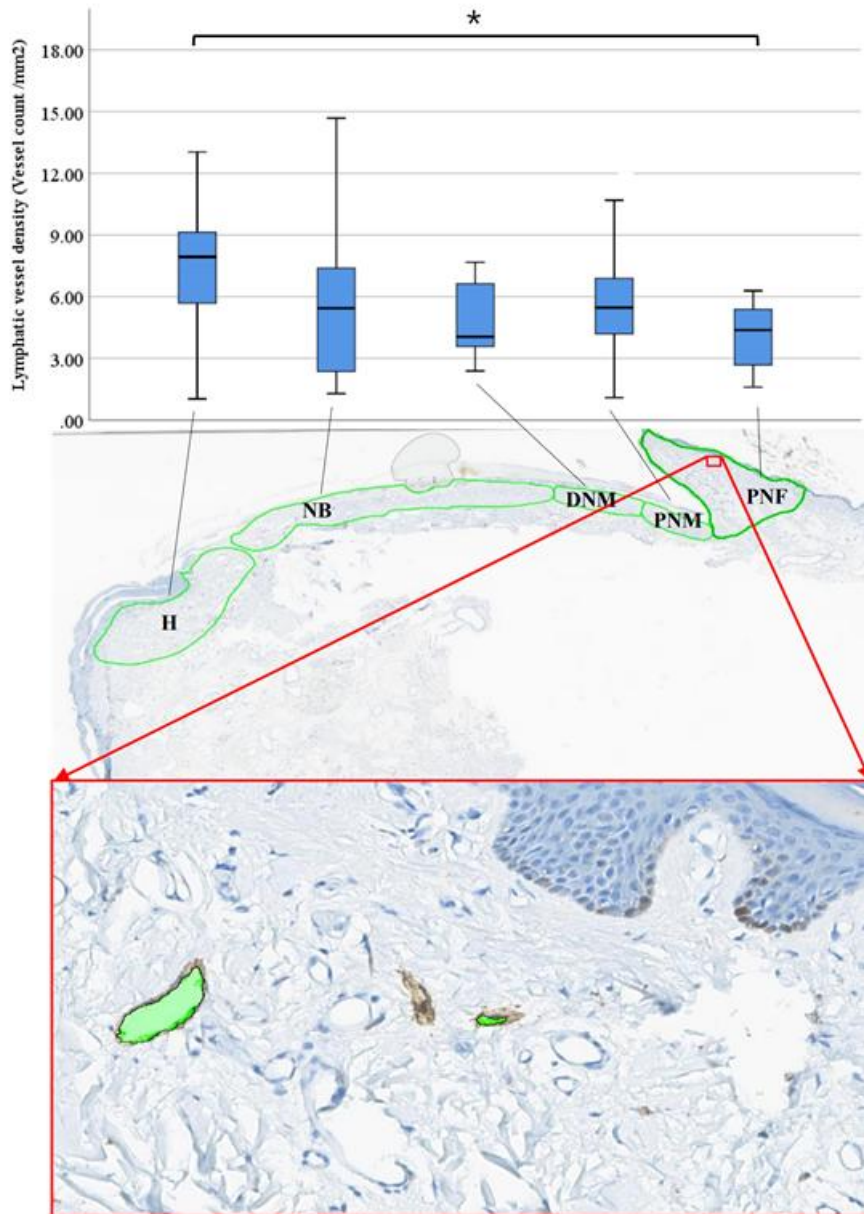
Representative cross-sectional histologic slide of specimens stained with Hematoxylin and Eosin depicting 11 landmarks.



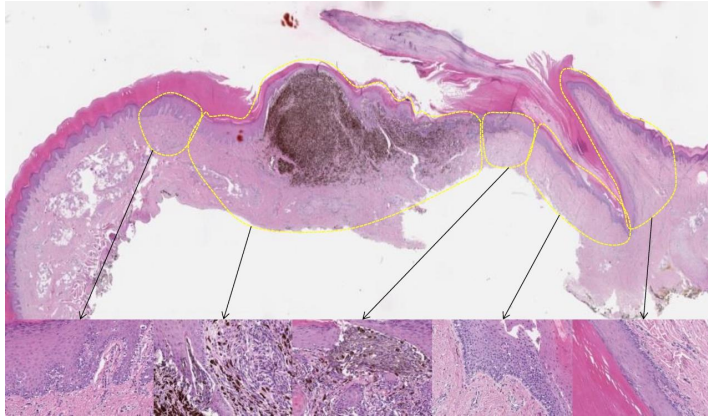
**Figure 2.** Microvessel density according to anatomic subunits

Top: Graph showing microvessel density (vessel count / area of subunit) according to the nail subunit. The asterix indicate differences that were statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) Middle: Representative slide of CD31 immunohistochemical staining of microvessels. The yellow lines demarcate the subunits. (H: Hyponychium, SM: Sterile matrix, GM: Germinal matrix, VFPNF: Ventral floor of proximal nail fold, DRPNF: Dorsal roof of proximal nail fold)

Bottom: Magnified figure of the CD31 IHC stained slide. The green area depicts the counted vessels at x400 magnification.



**Figure 3.** Lymphatic density according to anatomic subunits  
 Representative slide of D2-40 immunohistochemical staining of lymphatics.  
 (lymphatic count / area of subunit). Magnified figure of the D2-40 IHC  
 stained slide. The green area depicts the counted lymphatics at x400  
 magnification. (H: Hyponychium, SM: Sterile matrix, GM: Germinal matrix,  
 VFPNF: Ventral floor of proximal nail fold, DRPNF: Dorsal roof of proximal  
 nail fold)



	P	H	SM	GM	VFPNF	DRPNF	LN	Distant	Recur	Amp	TI
Invasion in hyponychium	1		*								12
	2		*								12
	3		*								8
	4	*									8
	5	*									8
	6	*									6
	7	*									6
	8	*									6
	9	*	*								4
	10	*									6
	11	*									4
In situ in hyponychium	12			*							10
	13		*								9
	14		*								7
	15		*	*							8
	16		*								7
	17		*								7
	18		*								6
	19		*								6
	20		*								7
	21		*								7
	22		*								6
	23		*								6
	24		*								5
	25		*								7
No tumor in hyponychium	26		*	*							6
	27		*								5
	28		*								5
	29		*								5
	30		*								4
	31		*								3
	32		*								2
	33		*	*							8
	34		*	*							7
	35		*	*							6
36		*	*							5	
37		*	*							5	
38		*	*							5	
39		*	*							5	
40		*	*							3	
41		*	*							3	
42		*	*							3	
43		*	*							3	
44		*	*							2	

**Figure 4.** Subungual melanoma

(A) Histological slide of specimen (*upper*)

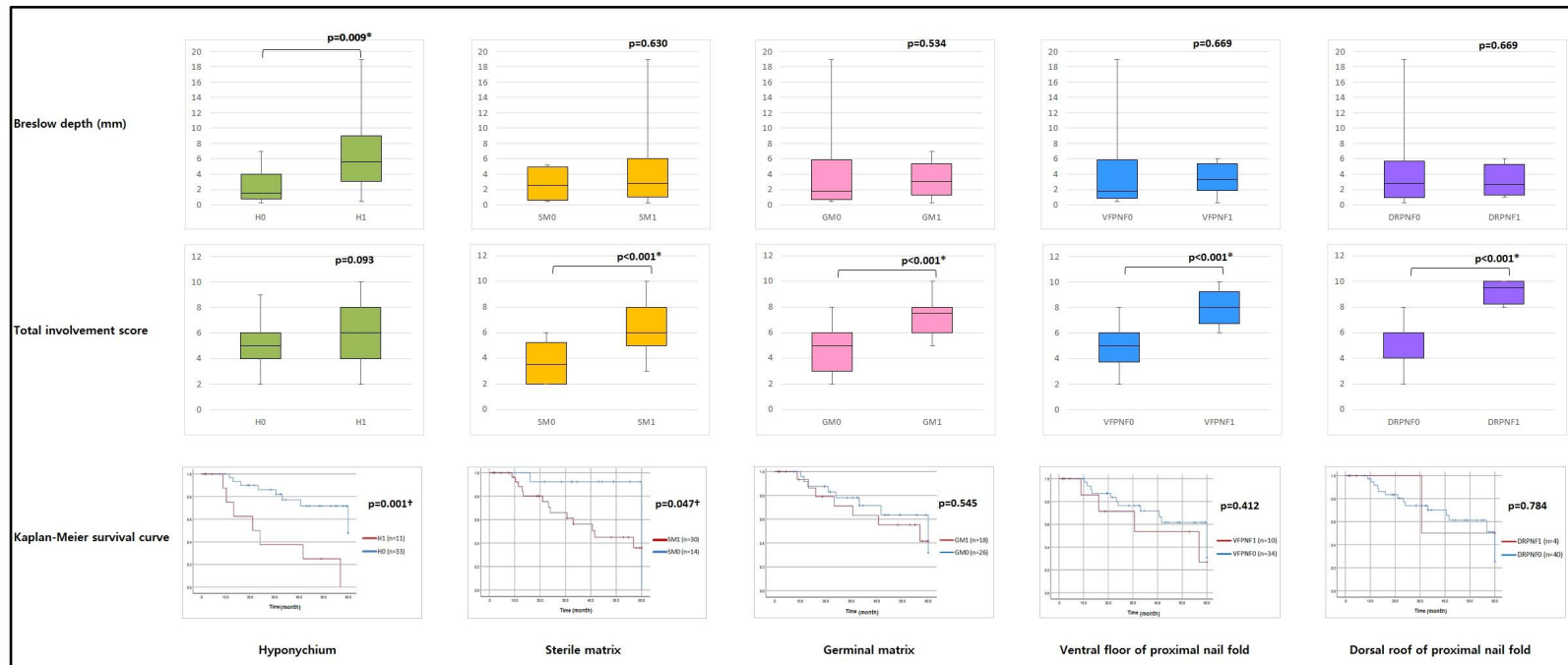
(B) Landscape of invasion in nail subunit and risk factors (*lower*)

Abbreviations: P, patient; H, hyponychium; SM, sterile matrix; GM, germinal matrix; VFPNF, ventral floor of proximal nail fold; DRPNF, dorsal roof of proximal nail fold; LN, lymph node metastasis; Distant, distant metastasis; Recur, recurrence; Amp, Amputation

The purple color indicates invasive lesions, the pink in situ lesions, and the light blue no tumors. The green indicates positive, whereas the yellow indicates negative. The dark blue indicates amputation, and the light pink indicates functional surgery.

\* Lesion with the deepest invasion





**Figure 5.** Dermal invasion of SUM in each nail subunit and correlation with Breslow depth, the total involvement score, and disease free survival Abbreviations: H0, No hyponychium invasion; H1, Hyponychium invasion; SM0, No sterile matrix invasion; SM1, sterile matrix invasion; GM0, no germinal matrix invasion; GM1, germinal matrix invasion; VFPNF0, no ventral floor of proximal nail fold invasion; VFPNF1, ventral floor of proximal nail fold invasion; DRPNF0, no invasion in dorsal roof of proximal nail fold; DRPNF1, invasion in dorsal roof of proximal nail fold \* indicates significant differences according to the Mann-Whitney U test with  $p < 0.05$  † indicates significant differences in survival curve according to the log-rank test with  $p\text{-value} < 0.05$

## Abstract

### 연구의 배경

조갑하흑색종은 진단이 지연되는 경우가 많아 예후가 좋지 않은 것으로 알려져 있다. 조갑하흑색종에 대해 절단술을 시행하는 경우가 많았으나, 이로 인한 기능적 장애를 최소화하고자 기능적 절제술이 최근에 많이 시행되고 있는 추세이다. 하지만 이를 위한 수술적 방법의 의견이 일치되지 않으며 실제 조갑하흑색종의 침윤 양상이나 관련된 예후에 대해서도 연구가 부족한 실정이다.

### 연구의 목표

이번 연구의 목표는 정상 손톱의 해부학적인 데이터를 측정하는 것이다. 또한 실제 환자에서 병리학적인 평가를 통해 손톱바닥의 소단위 별로 조갑하흑색종의 침윤 양상을 규명하고 이를 임상적인 예후와 연계시켜 분석하는 것이다.

### 재료 및 방법

손톱바닥을 다음과 같이 총 5개의 소구획으로 나누었다; hyponychium, sterile matrix, germinal matrix, ventral floor of proximal nail fold, dorsal roof of proximal nail fold. 21구의 시신연구를 통해서 손톱의 소단위별로 손톱바닥의 두께를 측정하였다. 면역조직화학검사를 통해 손톱 소단위별 미세혈관과 림프관의 분포를 조사하였다. 총 44명의 조갑하흑색종 환자의 임상데이터 및 병리슬라이드 리뷰를 진행하여 손톱 소단위 별 흑색종의 침윤 양상을 분석하고 이와 연관된 예후인자를 규명하였다.



## 결과

손톱바닥의 두께는 proximal nail matrix에서 가장 짧았고(엄지손톱;  $1.10 \pm 0.42$  mm 엄지발톱;  $1.15 \pm 0.37$  mm) hyponychium에서 가장 길었다(엄지손톱,  $2.86 \pm 0.82$  mm; 엄지발톱,  $2.72 \pm 0.84$  mm). 미세혈관 및 림프관의 밀도는 hyponychium에서 가장 높았고 ( $25.74$  vessels/mm<sup>2</sup>,  $7.55$  vessels/mm<sup>2</sup>) germinal matrix에서 가장 낮았다( $16.26$  vessels/mm<sup>2</sup>,  $4.14$  vessels/mm<sup>2</sup>) ( $p < 0.05$ ). 조갑하흑색종은 대부분 원위부에서 침윤이 관찰되었다. Hyponychium에서 침윤이 관찰된 환자의 경우 통계적으로 유의하게 Breslow깊이가 깊었으며, 임파선 전이( $p = 0.019$ ) 및 원격 전이( $p = 0.036$ )가 빈번하게 관찰되었고 무병생존율이 짧았다( $p = 0.001$ ).

## 결론

손톱바닥의 두께는 proximal nail fold에서 가장 얇았고, hyponychium에서 가장 두껍게 나타났다. 미세혈관 및 림프관은 hyponychium에서 가장 밀도가 높게 나타났다. Hyponychium에서 조갑하흑색종의 침윤이 있는 경우 침윤의 깊이가 깊고 임파선 전이, 원격 전이, 짧은 무병생존율 등을 보여 중요한 예후인자로 생각된다.

**Keywords:** 악성흑색종, 조갑하흑색종, 위험인자, 기능적 수술, 예후

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