Could an app cure your skin condition?

DERMATOLOGISTS could be forgiven for feeling a little uneasy at the moment. Barely a week goes by without a new skin-care app promising to do everything from curing acne to spotting melons. Here’s an app for that.

The L'Oreal group is at the forefront of this movement, thanks to its new app called Skincare, which helps users spot problems by giving them offers for skin care products. The benefits are clear: it’s a way to help people keep their skin healthy.

It also offers a suggested skincare routine. You can record your moles, and it combines the data to suggest a new skincare routine.

But there are concerns. Some apps are marketing tools, they’re not going to recommend a new product, even if it might be better for your skin.

The same is true of the Clay Skin Advisor app, which assesses your skin type and recommends a regime for your skin type. It’s a great tool, but the user can’t really be expected to follow the advice.

Many of these apps are clearly a marketing tool for brands, says consultant dermatologist, Alan O’Rourke. "But that doesn’t mean that they can’t also be helpful to the individual. You just have to keep in mind that the advice is based on the user’s experience and the information they give you."

There’s a slightly more worrying aspect to technology like this though, especially when it comes to apps that look at skin diseases. What if the app is used to sell you products, they may not necessarily be giving you the best advice either.

Last year, researchers at the University of Birmingham raised concerns that skin cancer apps have not been tested enough.

They felt that while apps have the potential to encourage early diagnosis and intervention, there’s no real reason to know that they are safe and effective.

Similar concerns were raised last year about apps claiming to help users manage eczema.

A STUDY of 88 apps in the British Journal of Dermatology this year found 54 percent contained information that was not consistent with international guidelines on how to treat eczema.

"Our research shows that there is a large variance in the quality of eczema apps," said Associate Professor Andy. "One of the common issues is that they don’t provide clear guidance on how to treat eczema.

"In fact, the best guidance is the British Association of Dermatologists. They can give you the advice of their dermatologists and make use of NOO guidelines.

"Broadly speaking, don’t let an app replace common sense. If you’re going pink in the sun, seek the shade. If you’re feeling tight, using a product, don’t apply it, and if you’re worried about a mole, see your doctor — whatever the app says."