



Figure 6.1 Schematic representation of a histological cross-section of the skin.

which terminally differentiate into the nonviable, flattened corneocytes of the stratum corneum. The stratum corneum is the outermost layer of the epidermis. The interlocking platelike structure of the highly keratinized corneocytes provides the major barrier function for the skin.

Melanocytes, Merkel cells, Langerhans cells, dendritic epidermal T cells, and epidermotropic lymphocytes represent the remainder of the minor epidermal cell populations. *Melanocytes* are pigmented dendritic epidermal cells that function to provide protection against ultraviolet radiation (UVR)-induced skin damage through the melanization, or tanning, process. *Merkel cells* do not, as yet, have a defined function, although it has been suggested that they serve as neurosensory receptors. *Langerhans cells*, *dendritic epidermal T cells*, and *epidermotropic lymphocytes* are distinct immunocompetent cell populations within the epidermis. Their phenotypic characteristics and functional properties are outlined in greater detail in the following section.