



Laser helps heal wounded warriors

by Wendy Rigby / KENS 5

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San Antonio's Wilford Hall Medical Center is making sure wounded warriors get the best treatments for their recovery. Our cameras were invited inside the operating room to show you a new tool designed to help those who've been badly burned.

The scars of battle last a lifetime for many of the American troops injured in Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom. Hundreds of wounded warriors have suffered deep third degree burns like Captain Ryan Voltin, a Marine pilot hurt back in 2007.

"I haven't kept track of the surgeries, but I've had somewhere around 40," Voltin said.

Now, Voltin is nearing the end of his medical voyage. A laser could provide the help and healing he needs, loosening up hardened and tightened skin, allowing him to move easier and appear more normal.

Dr. Chad Hivnor, a dermatologist at Wilford Hall Medical Center, is the doctor who mans the helm of the laser machine.

"A lot of the injuries that we're seeing coming back from Iraq are primarily very deep third degree burns which can be very problematic and require a lot of skin grafts and a lot of long term healing," explained Hivnor, chief of outpatient dermatology.

The tool is a fractionated carbon dioxide laser. "Fractionated" means it's delivered in a tiny grid, basically punching holes in the skin to cause a minor injury. The healing process creates the change.

"You have a cylinder that's being destroyed, but you have 360 degrees of normal tissue around that," Hivnor said. "So, therefore, you are able to heal superficially much, much faster."

Patients are under anesthesia. Zapping the head takes about a half hour. Including other parts of the body, in this case, Voltin's burned arm, can take an hour or two.

"I've already had pretty significant gains in those areas, contour-wise, as far as smoothing of scar bands and softening," Voltin commented.

At this point, Hivnor is only treating wounded warriors. He has plenty of patients. He's helped 50 so far. Some get just one treatment. Some get up to five sessions with the laser.

The benefits become evident on day one. As the collagen turns over, patients can see improvement over the next six months.

Marine Captain Daniel Moran was wounded by an IED in Ramadi in 2006. He said Wilford Halls' commitment to save life and limb keep him hopeful.

"I've seen the results," Moran commented. "I've seen the benefits of it. And I'm excited that other people can benefit from it. I hope other wounded warriors will take advantage of it."

Hivnor said he is honored to offer some small help to the people who have put their lives on the line for our country.

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