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Advances in Hair Transplantation

By Kathy Pearsall

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VICTORIA, BC—More people are enjoying new hairlines and fuller heads of hair due to an evolution in hair transplantation techniques that has taken place in the past decade, David M. Zloty, MD, clinical assistant professor, University of British Columbia, said.

"We are now transplanting more females and creating more refined hair lines," Dr. Zloty said at the annual meeting of the Canadian Dermatology Association. "We can transplant patients who are almost type 6 and 7 on the Norwood scale—those patients with the horseshoe rim. Because the grafts are so small we can give a very natural hairline. Five to 10 years ago, this was more difficult."

Back in 1995 when Dr. Zloty began performing hair transplants, the average session was 600 to 700 grafts. Today's average session stands at 2,000 grafts. These new grafts are much smaller, with a standard follicular unit graft comprising only one to four hairs. Today's technique is more refined, although the absolute amount of hair transplanted hasn't changed much.

Higher numbers of very small grafts have brought technical challenges, however.

- Preparation of true follicular unit grafts requires absolute precision and in many cases microscopic guidance to ensure hair follicles are not inadvertently damaged.
- As grafts have become smaller, it has become necessary to reduce the size of recipient slits. The difficulty arises in ensuring the proper orientation and angulation of such tiny slits (0.75–1.25 mm).
- One can only plant the grafts so close together before there is vascular compromise and consequent graft death. Optimizing the density of graft packing is one of the major technical issues that modern hair transplant clinics face today, he said. Very tight packing can also limit the area one can transplant is a single session.

"If the grafts are prepared poorly, recipient slits carelessly made, if grafts are planted roughly or allowed to dehydrate, they will grow poorly or they will die. You need very skilled people and a substantial investment in equipment including microscopes. The doctor becomes only one member of an expert, efficient, hair transplant team."

Donor strip harvest is moving from multiple to single blade techniques, followed by vertical slivering under the microscope. Both of these modifications claim to increase donor graft yields, but the evidence is weak.

Liposuction *Collagen/Hylaform/Artecoll*
Botox *Hair Transplantation*
Cosmetic Excisions

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Advances in Hair Transplantation, cont'd

"If there is less relative surface area that is cut with the blade, hopefully there will be less loss of the grafts and a more efficient scar," Dr. Zloty said. "In our hands we haven't noticed a difference in wastage between single and multiple blade techniques."

In most patients, donor site scarring is not usually of cosmetic concern. However, if a patient chooses to trim the hair in the donor area very short, the scar can be seen, Dr. Zloty said.

Internet Challenges

Dr. Zloty is concerned about misinformation and buzz words being thrown around on the Internet. "The marketing is very aggressive. In hair transplantation, many centres are said to be the best because of specific unproven modifications they have made to standard techniques. Competitors are portrayed as inferior if they do not perform these same modifications. Patients are still looking for a non-surgical, non-invasive hair transplantation, but this is certainly not going to happen in the near future."

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