

Stigma of tattoos is burned away with laser treatment

By **KAREN SMITH**
The Champion



Barb McKenna, 31, of Milton is getting the tattoo she calls an "eyesore" removed with laser treatments by an Oakville doctor.

BARB MCKENNA PAID \$14 to get a tattoo 15 years ago. Now she's paying \$1,300 to get rid of it.

The 31-year-old Foster Court woman says she no longer wants the "Prisoner of Love" (hand, heart and chain) tattoo she had put on her right arm at age 16. "I've lost a few jobs over it. It's an eyesore. It was a mistake," she says. "In my opinion, people look at you different. They label you."

Thanks to an Oakville doctor, Ms McKenna has found a way to remove it painlessly — without skin grafting or other undesirable methods.

Dr. Robert Jones operates the Vein & Laser Centre of Ontario, the only facility of its kind in Halton. Using cosmetic laser therapy, he has removed tattoos for 340 patients over the past three months.

Laser technology has been embraced by the medical community to correct many physical impairments for some time. Now there are advanced laser systems specifically designed for cosmetic surgery.

But Dr. Jones is doing a lot more for his patients than removing tattoos. He also treats a variety of skin conditions which have given people long-time anguish.

Special lasers safely and effectively eliminate spider and facial veins, age and liver spots, birthmarks, as well as tattoos, causing little discomfort to patients, Dr. Jones said.

Laser light can shrink tiny vessels around the nose and cheeks, eradicate brown spots often brought on with age or exposure to the sun, and treat larger areas of the skin for benign pigmented blemishes or port wine stains.

"Over the past 30 years there has been a widespread increase in the use of lasers in medicine,"

Dr. Jones said. "For use in treatment of skin conditions, in particular, the results have been excellent."

Dr. Jones began treating varicose and spider veins as part of his general practice in Oakville more than three years ago. As demand grew for these services, he added newer laser systems capable of treating other skin conditions. His office is located a short walk north of the Oakville GO station.

Laser treatments generally last from a few minutes to an hour, he said. Ms McKenna has had four treatments and still must undergo two more before her tattoo is completely gone.

For most patients, discomfort is minimal, said Dr. Jones. Depending on the size of the area being treated, the doctor may use topical or local anesthesia. Many patients are able to return to work directly from the doctor's office.

Most of the services offered at the Vein and Laser Centre are not covered by government health care. The costs vary depending on the type of treatment. Removal of a large, professional tattoo can cost up to \$2,000, said Dr. Jones.

"Laser technology is an evolving science. Over the next few years, we can expect a number of improvements in the methods of treatment and the technology will likely require less maintenance."

"The lower maintenance costs will make treatment less expensive and more accessible to a greater number of people."

The laser technology for cosmetic purposes was developed primarily in France and the United States. All of the laser equipment at the centre comes from California and Paris, France.

People, as well, have come to the centre from all across Canada and the United States to have cosmetic laser surgery performed by Dr. Jones.

He graduated from McMaster Medical School in 1979. He interned in Hamilton and has had a medical practice in Oakville for the past 12 years.

"I've lost a few jobs over it. It's an eyesore. It was a mistake."
Barb McKenna

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