

New laser treatment restores women's health

SUSAN BENNETT
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-PRESS

It's a painful topic that most older women don't like to talk about.

It's called vaginal atrophy or thinning of the vaginal walls leading to dryness, painful urination, burning, painful intercourse and lack of muscle tone. About 40 percent of women over the age of 50 have vaginal atrophy which also affects breast cancer survivors and women who have undergone hysterectomies.

"Until now, all we could really offer women was estrogen replacement therapy in the form of a pill or cream but those options have side effects. And estrogen replacement isn't an option at all for breast cancer survivors," said Dr. Rex Stubbs, obstetrician-gynecologist with Physicians' Primary Care of Southwest Florida.

A new option is now available that physicians and their patients are calling "life-changing." The MonaLisa Touch™ is a laser treatment that promises to restore vaginal health in three treatments.

Dr. Stubbs first heard about the treatment from Dr. Mickey Karram, director of urogynecology at The Christ Hospital in Cincinnati, which was the first clinical trial site for MonaLisa Touch™. The technology was approved by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) in late 2014.

"All patients in the clinical trials experienced overwhelmingly positive and almost immediate results," said Dr. Kevin Fleishman, obstetrician-gynecologist with Physicians' Primary Care of Southwest Florida. "The women studied showed a high, statistically significant improvement in symptoms—including dryness, pain, itching, painful urination and painful intercourse—after the first treatment. They experienced no side effects or adverse reactions and showed more progress with each subsequent treatment."

No anesthesia is needed and there is no downtime for the patient, according to both Dr. Stubbs and Dr. Fleishman.

Physicians' Primary Care of Southwest Florida obtained the MonaLisa Touch in May and is the only medical practice in Lee, Collier and Charlotte counties to offer the new technology. The laser treatment is an in-office procedure available at their OB-GYN office at 9021 Park Royal Drive in Fort Myers.

"With this new treatment, we're able to reverse the effects of vaginal atro-



Kevin Fleishman, M.D. Rex Stubbs, M.D.

phy using a fractional carbon dioxide (CO₂) laser. The results are long lasting and typically eliminate the need for vaginal estrogen therapy," Dr. Stubbs said.

Patients undergo a five-minute laser treatment to the vaginal wall to promote production of new collagen. The laser is able to release energy through a special pulse, and the laser energy heat penetrates to a depth that stimulates the synthesis of new collagen which results in the thickening of the

vaginal skin, increasing moisture and better lubrication which restores the vagina to a state similar to before menopause.

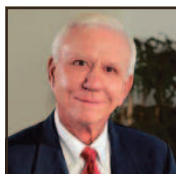
Three treatments are required, spaced six weeks apart. Insurance does not currently cover the treatments, which costs \$1,800 for the three treatments. The procedure then is done once on an annual basis.

Several obstetricians-gynecologists at Physicians' Primary Care of Southwest Florida are now trained in the new technology.

About a dozen local women have received the first treatment with all reporting immediate improvement in vaginal dryness, painful urination and painful intercourse.

"This truly is a game-changer," Dr. Fleishman said. "To be able to treat this condition without any side effects absolutely enhances the quality of life for these women who suffer with vaginal atrophy."

Susan Bennett, APR, CPRC, is a journalist and owner of Susan Bennett Marketing & Media, L.C., in Fort Myers.



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