

## Pulse Dye Laser Information for Patients

### Introduction

You have been referred for Pulse Dye Laser (PDL) treatment on your scar. This leaflet will give you some information about the procedure and what will happen at your appointment.

### What is Pulse Dye Laser?

PDL is used to treat the symptoms of scars, to lighten redness and improve the texture of skin and scar tissue. PDL is a machine which produces a short burst of concentrated light. This light passes through the top layer of your skin and is absorbed by the blood cells and vessels beneath. The light destroys the blood vessels which will cause a bruise. As the bruising settles, it will cause a reduction in the redness to the skin, the itch of the scar and the pain and thickness of the scar. An added benefit may be that the scar becomes softer. Occasionally, only limited effects are achieved from this treatment.

### What can I do to prepare for the treatment?

You should avoid exposing your scar to sunshine or use a high factor SPF sun cream for 3 months before and 6 months after laser treatment. You should also avoid using fake tan. This is because it can increase the risk of an uneven skin colour after treatment. More details are provided in the "What will the scar look like after the procedure" section below.

It is important that on the day of the treatment, you do not wear aftershave, perfume or hair gel. Your skin should be clean and free of any moisturiser or lotions. Please do not wear make-up or jewellery on or near the site to be treated.

On the day of your consultation, please bring a list of your medications and dosages, as some drugs may need to be stopped prior to your treatment. If you take Warfarin, you will need to contact your GP to have your international normalised ratio (INR) checked 2 - 3 days before your treatment date. Please bring the result with you. If it is higher than your normal range, please contact us on the numbers on the back of this leaflet as soon as you get the result.

If you are prescribed blood thinners (**e.g. clopidogrel, aspirin, rivaroxaban, apixaban etc**) you may need to stop them for a short time before laser treatment depending on why you are taking them. This will be discussed as part of your laser assessment process and further advice will be given to you. If you are taking blood thinners, the amount of bruising following the procedure may be worse.

Retinoids which have been prescribed by your doctor (e.g. drugs for acne treatments), should be avoided when having laser treatment. Oral Retinoids (**e.g. isotretinoin (Roaccutane®) acitretin (Neotigason®), alitretinoin (Toctino®)**) should be stopped for 6 months prior to your laser treatment. Topical Retinoids (e.g. Tretinoin (Retin-A®, Aknemycin Plus®), isotretinoin (Isotrexin®), adapalene (Differin®)) should be stopped for 2 weeks prior to your laser treatment. This is because it may lead to delayed healing and scarring.

**Please let the clinic know if you:**

- Have any allergies to medicines including local anaesthetic or dressings.
- Have had Herpes Simplex (e.g. cold sores) as this can be reactivated from laser treatment.
- Are pregnant, as there is an increased risk of permanent pigment (colour) changes or an increased healing time.
- If the wound has broken down or there is an infection in the area to be treated, the treatment must be delayed until the area is healed.
- If you have any new medical diagnosis's or any changes/additions to your medication.

It is recommended that you wear loose clothing in the area to be treated as closely fitting clothes may cause irritation after your treatment.

Some people can feel lightheaded after the treatment so it is advisable to arrange for someone to bring and collect you on the day. If you are having laser treatment near your eyes, then we do not recommend that you drive until all the swelling has resolved.

**What will happen on the day of the procedure?**

When you arrive, you will meet a member of staff involved in the laser treatment. They will explain the treatment to you and answer any questions.

Everyone in the treatment room must wear protective eye wear when the laser is being used. If the area being exposed to the laser is near the eye, special eye shields will be worn. Photographs will be taken of the area to be treated, if you give consent, so that the progress of your treatment can be monitored. The photographs will be kept in your confidential patient records.

On your first appointment with the laser clinic, you will have a small patch test to assess the scar and see how a small area of your skin reacts to the laser. Then you will be booked in for a treatment session in 4 weeks time.

Each pulse of laser light feels like the flick of an elastic band. Most patients do not find the treatment painful. A cold-air system which cools your skin during treatment is used to prevent pain. However, if this does not work, anaesthetic cream can be applied. The anaesthetic cream takes approximately 30 minutes to work and usually last for 4-6 hours.

If you are in any discomfort following this please take your usual painkillers.

**What will the scar look like after the procedure?**

Post PDL treatment there is immediate bruising to the area. This bruising may become darker during the 24 hours following treatment and can be followed by some crusting or blistering. It is important to allow the formed scabs to fall off naturally and are not removed or picked.

In some cases, the area treated can become temporarily pigmented (brown). This can be covered with makeup if necessary and will fade gradually over time. Avoid sun exposure until the area is healed to reduce the chance of pigmentation. Either cover up or use a high SPF sun cream for at least 6 months after your treatment.

**After the laser treatment.**

You can go home as soon as your appointment is finished.

To achieve the best outcome following laser treatment, please carefully follow the post-treatment instructions given to you.

Any discomfort after treatment is generally dealt with adequately by cooling the skin by using a cold compress.

If you are in any discomfort then please take your normal painkiller medication as per instructions. Most patients will find that nothing is required.

Makeup should not be worn until the next day, and then it must be applied and removed delicately. A mild, non-perfumed moisturiser may be used.

You can bath and shower as normal but avoid hot water, saunas or swimming until the swelling has resolved. Avoid sports or high risk physical activity until bruising has resolved.

Avoid scratching the area if it becomes itchy and try to avoid knocking or bumping it. Be very gentle with cleaning the area.

You may continue with your regime of moisturising but avoid massaging the area until it is healed. If you wear pressure garments, silicone or makeup products you should wait a minimum of 5 days before using them again.

If you are unsure, please contact the scar management clinic.

You may find it helpful to keep the treated area raised above the level of your heart to reduce swelling. Extra pillows at night are helpful for treatments on the face.

### **Potential side effects of PDL treatment:**

**Skin colour changes:** There is a small risk of brown colour changes. If any darkening occurs, due to formation of brown skin pigment, this usually fades over 6 - 12 months. If the skin is made paler, this may be permanent.

**Sensitivity to the sun:** After your treatment, your skin will be especially at risk of getting sunburnt. Either cover up or use a high SPF sun cream when in the sun for at least 6 months after your treatment.

**Infection:** Risks of infection can be reduced by following the aftercare recommendations. In very rare cases, if there are complications scarring can become worse. Signs of infection include any changes to fluid or pus leakage as well as excessive redness, heat and swelling appearing at the treated site. If any of those signs appear, please contact the clinic on the number below.

**Smoking:** Smoking and/or vaping affects the healing process of your skin and should be avoided. If you need advice or help with giving up smoking please contact the Queen Victoria Tobacco Dependency Advisor using the details below:

Email: [qvh.smoking-cessation@nhs.net](mailto:qvh.smoking-cessation@nhs.net)

Telephone: 01342 414000 extension number: 6615

Alternatively you can contact the NHS smoking Helpline on: 0800 022 4332.

### **Follow up appointments**

Most patients require multiple treatments, spaced around a month apart. Please take note of how long the area takes to heal following treatment and whether there has been any crusting or dryness in the area, as this may be used to inform future treatments. Your practitioner will book your next appointment before you leave.

### **Scar Assessments**

You will be asked, as part of the assessment process to complete a questionnaire and have your scars measured. To improve the service, the information you provide could be used in research. Please let the staff know if you would like your data NOT to be used in this way.

**Contact Details**

In working hours (08:00 - 17:00 Mon-Fri)

Please contact the Scheduling Team on 01342 414000 ext. 4847 or via email at: [qvh.plasticslaser@nhs.net](mailto:qvh.plasticslaser@nhs.net)

Concerns out of Hours (17:00 - 08:00 Monday-Sunday and Bank Holidays)

Please contact the Burns Unit on 01342 414 440

*In an emergency: If you become severely unwell, please attend your closest A&E department.*

**Useful Websites**

The websites below give useful information about the different types of scars and offer advice and guidance for people living with scars.

[www.howtotreatscars.com](http://www.howtotreatscars.com)

[www.changingfaces.org.uk](http://www.changingfaces.org.uk)

[www.dansfundforburns.org](http://www.dansfundforburns.org)

[www.katiepiperfoundation.org.uk](http://www.katiepiperfoundation.org.uk)

[www.scarfree.org.uk](http://www.scarfree.org.uk)

**Staff at the Laser Clinic:****Laser Practitioners:**

Louise Rodgers – Advanced Clinical Practitioner

Catherine Henn – Advanced Clinical Practitioner

**Consultant Plastic Surgeons:**

Baljit Dheansa

Paul Drake (Clinical Lead for Burns)



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