

## Customizing photoepilation

### Caution urged on tanned and light-haired patients

BY BETH KAPES STAFF CORRESPONDENT

**Washington** — Today's photoepilation is as individualized as the patient being treated, and it is up to the dermatologist to determine the appropriate laser system for each case, according to Elizabeth L. Tanzi, M.D.

"Any patient with unwanted hair is certainly a candidate for hair removal, but it is crucial to choose the correct laser system for their treatment — it's certainly not a 'one size fits all' therapy; not anymore," said Dr. Tanzi, co-director of laser surgery, Washington Institute of Dermatologic Laser Surgery, Washington, D.C.

While the general recommendation for the number of consecutive monthly treatments for all laser and light-based hair removal systems is three to five sessions, the type of skin and hair determines the chosen system's success. "Although studies have shown safety and efficacy using the IPL technology for all skin types, caution should be practiced when treating patients with dark skin tones," said Dr. Tanzi, who will present the advances in photoepilation at the upcoming annual meeting of the American Academy of Dermatology here Feb. 6-11.

#### Too dark or too light

The tanned patient may be most at risk for

adverse events following photoepilation for hair removal. "I don't like to treat tanned patients, due to the unpredictable nature of activated melanocytes," said Dr. Tanzi. "Tanned skin increases the risk of side effects, such as blistering, crusting, and some pigmentary changes. These are rare occurrences with the wide variety of laser systems available, but there is still a higher incidence (of these occurring) with tanned skin."

Other difficult patients to treat with photoepilation are those with light hair, but new technology has allowed for greater success with this patient group. "We're right on the cusp of being able to treat blonde hair," said Dr. Tanzi. "We have seen effective treatments with the use of combined light- and radiofrequency-based systems for blonde hair reduction. Many more than three treatments may be necessary to reduce the hair, and the success rate is not equal to regular laser hair removal, with current practice showing approximately 30-50 percent reduction."

A recent study (Tanzi EL, Alster TA. Long-pulsed 1064 nm Nd:YAG Laser-Assisted Hair Removal on All Skin types, *Dermatol Surg*, in press) suggests when using the 1064 nm Nd:YAG for a patient with pale skin, more than three treatments

could be necessary to obtain optimal results. Otherwise, the recommended number of treatments generally remains the same, according to Dr. Tanzi.

#### Realizing reduction

The primary focus when using photoepilation is how to best reduce unwanted hair, not necessarily how to accomplish permanent hair eradication, said Dr. Tanzi. "Depending on the area, such as the bikini and underarm, we can achieve anywhere from a 50-75 percent reduction in hair," she said.

Based on her experience, Dr. Tanzi prefers the 755nm alexandrite laser for lighter skin tones with darker hair. For darker skin tones, such as Middle Eastern, Hispanic and black patients, her favorite is the long-pulsed 1064nm Nd:YAG laser.

As photoepilation continues to evolve, the dermatologist can look forward to increased satisfaction for each patient. "Exciting technological advances and ongoing research will help define optimum treatment parameters and improve outcomes in the future," Dr. Tanzi said. 

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