

UPMC Passavant — Advanced Care for Nonhealing Wounds



Sandeep Kathju, MD, PhD, medical director, UPMC Wound Healing Services at UPMC Passavant, and Susan Rolniak St. John, CRNP, clinical nurse manager, in the hyperbaric oxygen treatment room.



Jodi Boory, RNC, wound care professional nurse, administers hyperbaric oxygen therapy.

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When Rev. Thomas Bracken Jr., a 62-year-old resident of Beaver Falls, had a motorcycle accident, he went to a hospital for treatment of a cut in his lip and what appeared to be a superficial puncture wound on his left calf.

“At the time, I didn’t think much about it,” says Rev. Bracken. “I was concerned about the wreck on my bike, but even worse was the fact that I wrecked it into my wife’s new truck — which she was sitting in at the time.”

When Rev. Bracken went back to the hospital to get the stitches removed from his lip, the wound in his leg was draining. Within four weeks, it became obvious that something was wrong, and he was prescribed a

14-day antibiotic that did nothing to solve the problem.

“I work as a senior chaplain for an organization that provides health care for the elderly, and while I was visiting their clinic, I asked a nurse for a bandage for my leg,” says Rev. Bracken. “She looked at it, and then a doctor looked at it and said, ‘You’ve got a problem.’ He diagnosed it as a major infection that had probably gotten into the muscles of my leg.”

Rev. Bracken was referred to UPMC Wound Healing Services at UPMC Passavant in Cranberry Township, where a doctor incised the wound and then consulted with a plastic surgeon on staff. Rev. Bracken was scheduled for surgery the next morning, and is now on his way

to a full recovery. “They took care of everything,” Rev. Bracken says. “The tests, labs, prescriptions; it was all arranged on the spot so that I could be ready for surgery in the morning. And they showed so much compassion and care — not just to me, but to my wife. They are the total package.”

While having a wound that just won’t heal is annoying, it’s also extremely dangerous, and can even lead to amputation. Whether a wound is caused by trauma, surgery, or a chronic medical condition, doctors need to find the underlying cause of the injury and understand why the wound won’t heal in order to restore a patient’s quality of life.

“UPMC Wound Healing Services at UPMC Passavant is part of a

coordinated effort across UPMC to put wound care on the front burner," explains Sandeep Kathju, MD, PhD, medical director, UPMC Wound Healing Services at UPMC Passavant. "These patients have been an underserved population for a long time, and we are focusing on this problem by taking full advantage of the efficiencies and professional capabilities that UPMC offers."

UPMC Passavant is UPMC's fifth wound healing center; others are located at UPMC Mercy, UPMC McKeesport, UPMC Northwest, and UPMC Horizon. Since opening in mid-June, the center has treated patients with a range of wounds, from diabetic foot wounds to those resulting from cancer treatment. "Any type of wound qualifies, from venous stasis ulcers caused by poor circulation to pressure ulcers caused by mobility issues to radiation burns caused by cancer treatments," explains Susan Rolniak St. John, CRNP, clinical nurse manager. "We also treat wounds caused by diabetes, as well as wounds whose causes are undetermined."

Patients can refer themselves to the center, although most are referred by their primary care providers (PCPs) or other medical specialists. The center treats wounds that have not been treated before, as well as wounds that have been treated previously without success.

"We review the history with the patient so that we understand what may have been tried and what didn't work before," says Dr. Kathju. "We have access to the latest technologies, so that if there are studies that need to be done, we can arrange for them, including studies that are not necessarily available at other hospitals."

"We address the whole body to determine why a wound occurred and why it won't heal," adds Ms. St. John. "There are many things that can cause nonhealing wounds, including swelling, underlying infections, foreign bodies, malnutrition — our goal is to

discover the cause in order to find the right treatment."

INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGY

Once the type and cause of a wound are determined, UPMC wound care specialists can plan the best course of treatment. Options include hyperbaric oxygen therapy (HBO), vacuum-assisted closure, bioengineered skin substitutes, aggressive medical and surgical interventions, compression wraps, ultrasonic technology, and state-of-the-art perfusion assessments.

"We've had great success using ultrasound technology that stimulates the tissues under the wound to promote circulation and healing," says Ms. St. John. "We've also had success using bioengineered skin substitutes that, when applied to the wound, provide a structure for the body's natural healing processes."

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— Rev. Thomas Bracken Jr.

Specialized dressings that are not commonly available are also used to enhance wound healing. "Unless a physician specializes in wound healing, they typically don't have these types of dressings," says Ms. St. John. "In fact, we get a lot of referrals from PCPs who have done their best to heal patients' wounds but need more advanced therapies."

Patients also have access to SensiLase®, a specialized technology that assesses oxygen circulation and flow in the body's tissues. "This allows our ultrasound technologist to provide immediate answers as to

whether there is a perfusion issue," says Ms. St. John. "If this is the case, we have vascular surgeons available on-site to fix the problem."

"If needed, we can get help from colleagues who are not formally part of the wound care center because we are an integrated part of UPMC Passavant," says Dr. Kathju, who adds that plastic surgeons and foot and ankle surgeons are also on staff. "Many wound care centers are not headed by surgical staff, which means that many times surgical options may be deferred or missed."

Another advanced technology, HBO, uses pressurized oxygen to reach deep into the body's tissues to increase natural wound-healing mechanisms that are oxygen-dependent. This noninvasive treatment also can stimulate the growth of new blood vessels for improved circulation. HBO can be used to treat a variety of conditions, including severe diabetic foot wounds, chronic osteomyelitis, compromised skin flaps and grafts, crush injuries, late effects of radiation, and necrotizing soft tissue infections.

George Pilszak Jr., 61, a Shaler resident, had a diabetic wound caused by a small blister that got infected. After three hospitalizations, multiple surgeries to cut out the infection, months of antibiotics, and months of home care, he was referred to UPMC Wound Healing Services at UPMC Passavant. There, he was found to be a good candidate for HBO. "I had heard of hyperbaric oxygen therapy but was unaware of what it could do," he says. "My wife and I were given a tour of the oxygen chamber by Jodi Boory (UPMC wound care professional nurse), who told us how it worked and even explained what it would feel like. In addition to being extremely kind, she calmed our apprehension. I felt like I was in good hands."

Mr. Pilszak received HBO treatment five days a week for six weeks, and is now finishing an additional three-



(above) Michele O'Brien, ultrasound staff technologist, with patient, Rev. Thomas Bracken Jr.



(left) Cindy Michael, clinical assistant, and Kristan Roth, patient business service representative, confer at the nurses' station in the new wound healing services facility.

week course of therapy. "The wound is healing well and the skin has started to grow over it — it's really progressing nicely," he says. "What amazed me the most is that in about seven or eight visits, I saw more improvement in the wound than I had in the previous four months."

While many patients are concerned about feeling claustrophobic in the HBO chamber, Mr. Pilszak advises them not to worry. "You can watch a movie or listen to music; I'm so comfortable that I usually fall asleep in there," he says.

COMPLETE PATIENT CARE

Part of helping patients get better is not just healing physical wounds, but helping them through the recovery process as well. "While the healing properties of the HBO chamber are superb, it's really the people that make the difference," says Mr. Pilszak. "While I'm sure that other places have the same type of chamber, I don't know if the quality of the people is the same. The whole

staff is just extremely kind — they really take the time to make you feel comfortable."

Rev. Bracken agreed. "When the doctor first incised my leg, my wife

got a little upset, and they took the time to sit with her and hug her and just take care of her," he explains. "I'm the one with the wound, but she's my best friend and we've been married for 42 years, so when you take care of her, you take care of me.

"When we went home, they made sure that we had everything we needed — every bandage, every Q-tip — they even sent a home care nurse to the house," he adds. "And when I started to develop dermatitis and my wife called them, they got me in the next day. It's like you're a part of the family — the place is just beyond incredible." ■

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UPMC Passavant

To learn more about UPMC Wound Healing Services at UPMC Passavant, call **724-720-5959** or visit **UPMCPassavant.com/WoundHealing**. The center is located in Cranberry Township at 2030 Mackenzie Way, Suite 400, which is not on the main hospital campus, so please call for directions.

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