

State-of-the-art Treatments Benefit Patients at The Wound Healing Center

BY VANIESSA ORR

Many people live with chronic wounds for months or even years, despite the fact that this condition can lead to other medical issues, including amputation. At the Wound Healing Center at Rockdale Medical Center, physicians and staff work to provide the care that patients need to prevent new wounds from developing into something more serious, while also providing state-of-the-art treatment to those already suffering from the chronic condition.

"The healing begins here," says Director Cherrie Cust-Harris of the Center that opened in May of 2007. "Our goal is to provide better healing outcomes in shorter time spans by working in conjunction with a patient's primary care physician or referring specialist. We work as a team for the benefit of the patient."

The Wound Healing Center was developed in response to the growing number of people developing diabetes in the Rockdale and Newton communities, as well as to treat its aging population. "The elderly tend to have vascular disease or poor circulation," said Cust-Harris, "and diabetes tends to compromise the healing process. A bump on the foot can turn into a diabetic ulcer in a couple of months. And because patients often have comorbidities, such as diabetes and poor circulation, their wounds will not heal."

The Wound Healing Center was also built in answer to physicians' requests that there be a place to deal with the increasing number of chronic wound patients that they were treating. One of the doctors that spearheaded the creation of the Center: Vascular Surgeon Dr. George Isshak, is now the Wound Healing Center's medical director. "Many doctors don't have access to the specialized modalities that we have here," said Cust-Harris. "It is also more cost-effective to refer a patient to us; in the time it takes a physician to treat one wound patient, they could have seen three other patients."

A chronic wound is described as one that does not heal after four weeks of treatment. The Wound Healing Center treats patients of all ages, though approximately 60 to 70 percent of their patients are elderly. "We do see some younger patients with post-surgical wounds or burns, as well as patients dealing with post-radiation injuries or hemorrhagic cystitis, an inflammation of the bladder," said Cust-Harris.

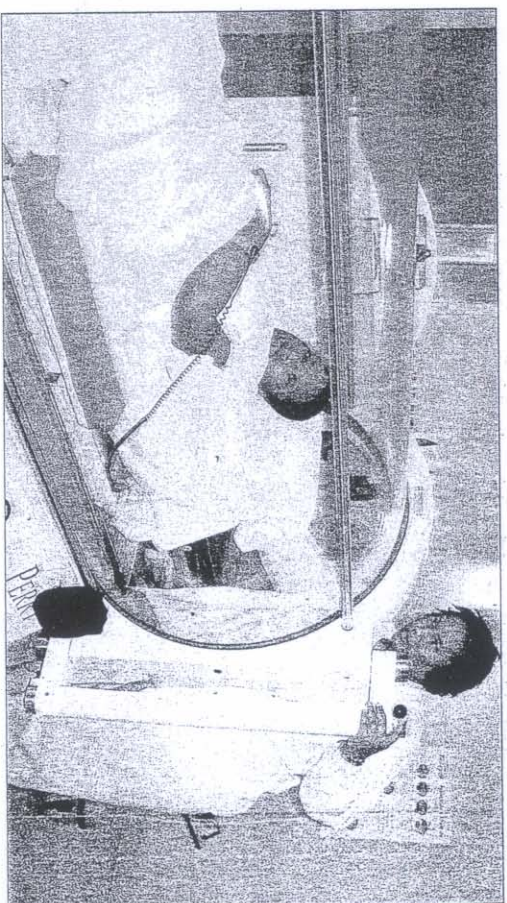
Depending on a patient's diagnosis, there are a number of state-of-the-art treatments available. These include human skin grafts that help to regenerate new skin, topical ointments including some that contain silver to better fight infection, and dressings for edema of the limbs. The Wound Healing Center also has two hyperbaric oxygen chambers that enable patients to breathe in more oxygen, which expedites the healing process.

"During hyperbaric oxygen therapy, a patient is placed into a clear, acrylic, pressurized chamber and we pump in 100 percent oxygen," explained Cust-Harris. "The chamber simulates a 33-foot dive beneath water, and at this depth, the body absorbs all of the gases in the environment. So the patient is taking in 100 percent oxygen, compared to the 21 to 22 percent of oxygen we breathe in at sea level. This oxygen, which is very rich, gets into his or her blood and plasma and travels to the wound."

Those with diabetic ulcers are good candidates for this treatment, which lasts about an hour-and-a-half. After 20 treatments, the patient is reassessed to see if they need further care. "The average person needs between 40 and 60 treatments, which is a big commitment of time," said Cust-Harris. "However, the alternative is to lose a limb. We know that amputation reduces a person's life span; a person who has had one limb removed may live five



Cherrie Cust-Harris



Micha DiProspero, HBO tech, places Shameika Bowe in the HBO Chamber.

years; a double amputee may die in three.

"It's a very severe condition, which is why we treat it so aggressively," she added. "Eighty percent of amputations are preceded by a chronic, nonhealing wound."

"To have a state-of-the-art wound center that utilizes a modern approach to wound care, including hyperbaric oxygen therapy, is a great service to the patients in our community," stated Dr. Isshak. "Patients do not have to travel out of the local area to receive quality care."

"While state-of-the-art technology is important to us, so is providing compassionate care," added Cust-Harris. "We treat the wound and everything else. We want to know how our patients' home lives are, and how they are doing outside the hospital because all of this matters in the healing process. We also spend a lot of time educating our patients, so that they can take better care of themselves."

For more information on The Wound Healing Center at Rockdale Medical Center, visit www.rockdalemedicalcenter.org or call (678) 413-7738.

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