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Tattoos disappear at Evans

By Jeff Troth, MEDDAC PAO

Marking one's body with tattoos has occurred for thousands of years. And they used to be considered permanent, unless the person was willing to sand, or cut the ink out.

Today removing unwanted ink is a much less painful experience. Lasers are used to break up tattoo ink into particles as tiny as a grain of sand, which the body can then absorb.

"Most people say that the pain is similar to getting a tattoo but lasts a much shorter duration of time," said Dr. Deborah Henderson, a dermatologist at Evans Army Community Hospital. "And the treatment is fast with each treatment lasting normally between 15 to 20 minutes."

The Evans dermatology clinic has been helping Soldiers remove their unwanted ink since last October.

"When we started it was a little slow, but has really picked up since the beginning of the year," Henderson said. "We see at least one tattoo removal patient each day, sometimes four or five."

Although the treatment sessions may not be long, erasing the past does take time. Henderson said that to completely remove a tattoo takes seven to 10 treatments, with a session every six to eight weeks.

"Anything that has more pigment, more color, will take more treatments," she said. "And sleeves (tattoos that cover the arm) take more than the normal 7 to 10 sessions."

Currently at Evans this process is only open to active duty military, and only for tattoos that are exposed while in PT uniform. This includes tattoos that are located mid-bicep down, mid-thigh down and tattoos on the front of the neck.

Although the hospital has only been doing tattoo removal for a year, funding for the equipment was requested in 2014 when Army Regulation 670-1 Wear

and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignias was updated with restrictions on tattoos. Some of the 2014 rules on tattoos were: tattoos on the head, face, neck, hands, fingers and wrists were forbidden; no more than four hand-size tattoos below the elbow and knee; and it prohibited sleeve tattoos.

A year later that regulation was updated and there are no longer limits on the size or number of tattoos soldiers can have on their arms and legs. However, face, neck and hand tattoos remain against regulation, with the exception of one ring tattoo per hand.

Although AR 670-1 now allows Soldiers to have visible tattoos Evans is still seeing a need from Soldiers to remove tattoos. Although the reason for getting a tattoo may be varied, wanting to remove them falls into only a couple categories, according to Henderson.

"We see a lot of Soldiers who are transitioning out of the military and want tattoos removed in order to get a job," Henderson said. "Sometimes the tattoos were emotionally driven or politically incorrect statements that they no longer agree with.

"Some of the more common tattoos that we are asked to remove are names of significant others that are no longer significant," she added. "Things change and they want them taken off."

"I am getting mine removed for professionalism and to get rid of past markings," said Gary, who just had his first treatment to remove a tribal band tattoo from his bicep. "When I got it 13 years ago, I thought it out ahead of time and was methodical about what I got, but there is no need to have it now."

James, who has had four treatments to remove a tattoo he got when he was 19, agrees with Gary.

"I was fine with it when I got it, but now it doesn't look so professional," James said. "I looked at getting it removed off post, but it is really costly, over \$100 for two sessions, and depending on the laser they are using who knows how many sessions it would take."

"I think having it available on post is awesome," said Gary. "It not only saves the person money, but can help to build up a person's self-esteem by

correcting any blemishes that might inhibit them from having a strong attitude.”

If you are in need of a tattoo removal, ask your doctor for a referral, or call the dermatology department at 526-7185.



Dr. Deborah Henderson, a dermatologist at Evans Army Community Hospital, uses a laser to remove a tattoo. Photo by Jeff Troth