Feature Article

Hair microPigmentation Treatment – A Complimentary Camouflaging Hair Loss Solution

HPT®, more commonly known as scalp micro-pigmentation or scalp tattooing is a revolutionary semi-permanent micro-pigmenting technique that offers an alternative option for both men and women suffering from hair loss who are not appropriate candidates for hair transplant surgery or who do not want it. HPT® involves the use of a digitally controlled needle that applies medical grade hypoallergenic colour pigment into the scalp.

Unlike a traditional tattoo that would use 'ink', HPT® is performed using specially designed pigments that will not have the colour change or migration (blurring) that is commonly seen with a body art tattoo.

Although it may appear to be a similar technique, the needles and treatment depth into the skin are very different. Both use needles to implant colour, but that is where the similarity ends. Traditional body art tattoos do have the tendency to change colour. If it was black to start with, very often they will turn blue as a result of migration due to the type of ink used and the tissue level the tattoo was implanted. HPT® is not implanted at a deep level on the scalp and the simulated hair follicles are implanted in the very top layers of the epidermis.

HPT® is designed to last a number of years and typically we would expect this treatment to last between 1-3 years with some minor maintenance or touch ups. However, it is impossible to predict the exact length of time the treatment will last, as each patient is different and lifestyle choice and other variables can effect the treatment in individual cases. The pigments used are designed to fade over time. This makes it possible to adjust the tone and change the hairline to be more 'age appropriate' for patients as they mature.

HPT® is a multi-treatment procedure which will usually require 2-3 sessions to complete the overall treatment for the best results. Depending on the size of the area to be treated and the extent of a patient's hair loss each session will take 2-4 hours. The treatment in itself is not painful as the depth the pigment is implanted is only in the dermis and not deep like a body art tattoo, but it is advisable to not work longer than in 4 hour sessions as it is a residual build-up of 'irritation' that can eventually make the scalp feel sore.

Scalp micro-pigmentation to date has most widely been used as a hair loss solution for male pattern baldness. In the majority of cases the procedure is used to give the patient the illusion of a closely shaven head or cropped appearance. However, as a complimentary hair loss solution HPT can be effectively used to camouflage transplant scarring from surgery, enhance hair restoration procedures or camouflage diffuse thinning and hair loss specifically for women.

HPT® For Male Pattern Baldness

HPT® can create the illusion of either denser looking hair, creating a hairline or even full head coverage 'shaven look' that previously may have been unachievable for the patient with other hair loss solutions. The hairline is the most important part of the scalp micro-pigmentation treatment, as this is the focal point, and will determine the overall look. If not done correctly the treatment will look unnatural and fake.

It is important to take a consultative approach with the patient to work with them to design, mark, measure and approve each hairline before any pigment is implanted. Some patients may wish for a very defined hairline, but we often advise them to try a more natural look that takes into account age-appropriateness and ethnicity.

HPT® With Transplant Surgery

HPT® can be used to enhance any successful hair restoration surgery, either Follicular Unit Extraction or Follicular Unit Transplantation, by creating the illusion of thicker “hair” at root level and infilling between transplanted grafts. A growing number of our HPT® procedures are referrals from surgeons where the patient did not have enough donor hair for surgery or required the illusion of additional density to improve the overall result of their transplant.

HPT® For Transplant Scarring

We have used HPT® to effectively treat a number of patients to camouflage scarring; either strip scarring, hole punch or plug marks left after hair transplant surgery. The pigment is implanted into the scar tissue, matching the hair follicles and hair surrounding it and depending on the type of scar that needs camouflaging the pigment will be blended into the hair surrounding the scar for a more natural look. Scar tissue is very different in composition to that of healthy skin and can be unpredictable in how it reacts to scalp micro-pigmentation treatment and retention

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of the implanted pigment. HPT is only appropriate for the treatment of scars more than a year old that are fully healed.

HPT For Female Diffuse Thinning

Female hair loss sufferers are particularly limited in the solutions available to them. This condition can be devastating for women in particular, who often feel self-conscious and isolated when experiencing hair loss. Female hair loss is a problem that is affecting an ever-increasing number of women due to modern lifestyles and varying underlying medical conditions. HPT® has immediate results and will create the illusion of thicker hair, taking the focus away from the scalp or bare patches and reduces the time and pressure on the patient of having to hide these thinning or bare patches under headwear or ensuring their hairstyle is always ‘exact’ to cover these areas. Additionally, the illusion of ‘hair’ follicles from HPT® far surpasses the results achievable from any concealer product on close inspection, with no need for daily application and eliminates the fear factor of being ‘found out’, giving the patient the freedom to engage with physical and social activities with confidence.

Summary

Awareness of HPT® or scalp micro-pigmentation as a potential solution for hair loss suffers, in particular women suffering from diffuse thinning, is currently low. Indeed a number of industry bodies and hair loss charities do not acknowledge this treatment, alongside other alternative solutions, on their websites.

We firmly believe that all scalp micro-pigmentation practitioners should have a comprehensive understanding and knowledge of hair loss causes and the broad range of hair loss solutions, both surgical and non-surgical, that are available to patients. Only by having an in-depth knowledge of hair loss causes and the broader treatments available can we give a holistic recommendation for the best solution, or course of treatment, that is right for the patient. In a number of cases this will be HPT®, as the majority of patients we see and treat have already explored other hair loss solutions. However, for a few patients the best course of treatment will be HPT® in combination with another solution e.g. hair restoration surgery, or not HPT® at all.

The quality of consultation for this treatment is of vital importance. To this end our approach is endorsed by Glenn M. Callaghan, PhD Professor of Psychology & Director of Clinical Training at the Department of Psychology San Jose State University. The more time you invest with your patient really listening to and understanding their hair loss situation and history at the consultation stage, the more likely they are to be satisfied with the final result. If a patient has emotional or psychological issues, the likely outcome is that they will not be satisfied or happy with any scalp micro-pigmentation treatment you perform.

We always stress that although the treatment can create the illusion of hair or hair density, it is not actual hair. If a patient is a suitable candidate for hair restoration surgery and can afford it, we would recommend that this is the route they should take. Hair loss suffers, if they could turn back the clock, would always choose the time in their life when they had a full head of natural hair.

One of the key strengths of HPT® is its potential usage in combination with other hair loss solutions to help patients realise their hair loss goals. Whether this is women using the treatment in combination with continued use of hair concealers or patients who have undergone hair restoration surgery looking to create the illusion of additional density to enhance the overall result of their transplant. It is in the area of working with hair restoration clinics that we are starting to see the greatest synergy when promoting the benefits of HPT® as a combination treatment. One of the most common complaints that patients have after hair transplant surgery, according to the ISHRS 2013 Practice Census, is that the density of their transplant was less than they expected, with 64.1 per cent highlighting this factor. An increasing number of hair transplantation clinics are starting to see the value of offering scalp micro-pigmentation as an additional service to their patients. Either as a complimentary treatment to create the illusion of additional density, enhance the overall result of the surgical procedure and increase patient satisfaction. Or as a standalone solution for both male and female hair loss patients who were unsuitable candidates for hair restoration surgery that previously they may have been unable to treat at the clinic.

Currently scalp micro-pigmentation is unregulated and there is little in the way of quality control or standards. To address this we have developed HPT® scalp micro-pigmentation into a training course, which is the only course of its kind to have been independently endorsed by the pertinent industry bodies and gained global training accreditation through the Skin Health Alliance. The course has been specifically designed for hair restoration clinics and their surgical teams, dermatologists and experienced micro-pigmentation practitioners.

By improving the quality of scalp micro-pigmentation, raising standards and making the treatment more accessible to patients through hair restoration clinics we hope that in the future industry bodies, such as the ISHRS, and hair loss charities will start to acknowledge and promote scalp micro-pigmentation alongside other more established hair loss solutions as an option for individuals suffering from hair loss.

Anouska Cassano

Anouska is a highly experienced micro-pigmentation practitioner who specialises in the areas of scalp micro-pigmentation, aesthetic permanent makeup, medical and reconstructive (areola restoration, vitiligo, cleft lip reconstruction, asymmetry, burns), scar camouflage and reduction (MCA dry needling, Meso ReVital), chemical tattoo removal and correction. She is a member of BABTAC and SPCP and since qualifying top of her course has continued to develop her skills and is now recognised as an expert within the broader field of micro-pigmentation. She was invited by CIBTAC to be their technical expert for all micro-pigmentation where she now advises on all technical aspects of micro-pigmentation for insurance purposes and new course approvals. It is in the area of scalp-micro pigmentation that Anouska is specifically regarded as being an expert in her field, having worked with some of the leading hair transplantation clinics and surgeons in the UK, Europe and USA. In June 2014, Anouska was invited to attend the International Society Of Hair Restoration Surgery European Workshop in Brussels to demonstrate her HPT® technique for scar camouflage to over 150 of the world's leading hair restoration surgeons.

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