

WCH Wound Center uses HBO to Treat Former Cancer Patients

Thanks to early detection and new therapies, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that 64 percent of adults whose cancer is diagnosed today will still be living in five years.

Of the more than one million people who will be diagnosed with cancer this year, half will undergo radiation therapy. Yet after beating cancer, many patients who undergo radiation therapy discover a hidden complication that may not come to light until years after they concluded treatments.

"Radiation doesn't differentiate between cancerous and healthy tissue," says Dr. Robert Bartlett, corporate medical director of hyperbaric oxygen for National Healing Corporation whose Wound Healing Centers around the nation treat radiation injuries. "Radiation causes a lack of oxygen in the body's tissues but visible symptoms of soft tissue radiation injury may not occur until as much as 20 years later."

"Hyperbaric oxygen therapy (HBO) is the only therapy known to reverse the vascular compromise responsible for late radiation effects," Barlett explains. "There are no alternative therapies that correct the problems these patients have. Nothing is a cure-all but HBO offers 60 to 80 percent of patients either improvement or complete resolution of the injury."

While receiving hyperbaric oxygen treatments, patients watch movies while relaxing on a bed incased in a large see-through plastic shell as they are surrounded by 100 percent oxygen at higher-than-normal atmospheric pressure which enables oxygen molecules to pass through the plasma to the body more easily and speed healing.

The local experts at **The Hyperbaric Medicine & Wound Healing Center of Wooster Community Hospital** offer hyperbaric oxygen therapy and provide these tips to identifying and treating radiation therapy:

- Unlike more typical chronic wounds, soft tissue radiation injuries are usually not as visible.
- Most common symptoms that suggest radiation injury are presence of blood in urine, rectal bleeding, vaginal discharge and pain.
- Post-irradiated skin initially may resemble early skin changes consistent with thermal injuries: redness or alterations in pigmentation, itching, wounds caused by excess scratching and pain.
- Areas especially prone to tissue injury are those covering bony prominences, surgical areas and those on the face. Moist skin folds such as those under the breast, the armpit and around the anus and genitals are also vulnerable.

- Soft tissue radiation injuries often arise after tooth extraction in patients with prior radiation therapy. The second most common group of patients are those who have received radiation to treat gynecological, prostate and colon cancer.
- Radiation injuries may occur spontaneously or in response to a traumatic injury or infection. The wounds may appear superficial and the pain associated with these injuries is often the reason a patient seeks treatment.
- Patients who are currently receiving chemotherapy must have a thorough review by a hyperbaric physician before being treated for injuries since some drugs may have adverse effects.

For more information about radiation injury and treating and preventing chronic wounds, contact **Hyperbaric Medicine & Wound Healing Center located at Wooster Community Hospital** by calling **330-263-8750**.