

Laser relieves painful foot problem

Frustrating infections respond to treatment
With new, high-powered flashes of light

By Dr. Christopher B. Stewart

A plantar wart is simply a common wart located in the thickened skin on the sole of the foot. The medical term for this entity is “verruca vulgaris”.

Descriptive words such as “ugly”, “painful”, “frustrating”, “embarrassing” and “stubborn” have all been used to describe plantar warts.

Historically, plantar warts have been despised not only for their awful appearance but for the pain and significant amount of discomfort they generate.

A wart begins as an infection that enters through weakened skin that is thin, cracked or cut – even microscopically. Once inside the skin, the virus causes a wart to form. Unfortunately, as the virus reproduces, it often spreads to adjacent areas of skin, causing the formation of other warts. As the infection progresses, clusters of warts termed “mosaic warts” may be created.

Warts by themselves are very difficult to treat and mosaic warts are even more resistant to curative measures. Medical treatments for plantar warts include the use of topical acids, freezing gases or liquids, burning treatments, the application or injection of chemical agents or surgical excision of the infected tissue. No one of these treatments has shown an outstanding curative rate, but each has a place in the war on warts.

Recently, a new treatment modality has been added. This modality, called the Flash Lamp Pulsed Dye Laser, has shown the ability to eradicate the most stubborn plantar warts – even the dreaded mosaic type.

During a typical treatment session, the laser is directed at the wart using a tiny pencil-like hand piece or “wand”. Because the laser operates at a wave length that is potentially harmful to the eye, protective eye goggles must be worn.

Several pulses or flashes of light can be seen as the laser attacks the warty tissue. As many patients describe it, each pulse feels like the snapping of a large rubber band against the skin. Depending upon the size and type of wart, some conditions will respond to the very first treatment. Most will require at least one more session.

The Flash Lamp Pulsed Dye Laser selectively treats the wart without adversely affecting the surrounding skin. Some studies have shown success rates of greater than 90 percent without scarring of the skin. Treatment only takes a few minutes and normal activity can be resumed almost immediately.

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