

Blood for beauty

So-called Vampire therapy now available in Calgary

BY THERESA TAYLER, CALGARY HERALD SEPTEMBER 1, 2011

A little bruising here, some swelling there, a sudden loss of blood?

According to Karen Prymack, these side-effects seem little price to pay for turning back the clock and making those well earned laugh lines disappear.

The 55-year-old is one of the first Calgarians to undergo a new, "all-natural" beauty treatment commonly referred to as Vampire, or Dracula, therapy.

Prymack has volunteered to take a stab at the new procedure offered by Dr. Jason McWhirter at his downtown Calgary clinic, ReNue.

"As I get older, I've noticed laugh lines, a frown line on my forehead and my lips getting smaller. I want to look better and I'm anxious to see how this all turns out," Prymack says. "I don't like the thought of putting harsh chemicals on my face . . . "

The technical title for the procedure is Platelet Rich Plasma Therapy (PRP). You may have read about it in Vogue, Elle or one of many other fashion and beauty mags on the market. PRP is getting a lot of beauty-insider buzz.

About 30ccs of blood are taken from the patient, then spun in a centrifuge to separate the platelets out. Calcium gluconate is added to the platelet-rich plasma to help activate the growth factors; that mix is injected back into the patient's face - near wrinkles and laugh lines, for example - where it's meant to stimulate and increase collagen production as well as restore the skin.

The PRP process has previously been used in treating athletic injuries, such as tendinitis; several years ago, a few savvy European doctors decided to put it to work as a cosmetic procedure.

Vampire therapy has been all the rage in the British medi-spa industry since 2009, and now McWhirter says he's the first doctor to offer it in Calgary.

McWhirter works on Prymack's face for about 10 minutes.

"She's just going to feel a few slight pin pricks" he says, as he injects her forehead.

"This is a procedure that can be done easily over the lunch hour. It wouldn't be any problem returning (to work) with a little bit of makeup afterwards."

Over the next six weeks, Prymack's complexion is meant to improve naturally.

"(Prymack) was someone who, after talking to us about rejuvenation, was very interested in having something done natural and something that she wasn't going to look overdone or embarrassed about," McWhirter says.

The true results of Prymack's PRP therapy session may be hard to decipher, however. While the doctor did not mention performing any other recent beauty treatments on Prymack, Prymack told the Herald that McWhirter had also given her Botox injections about a week before she underwent PRP therapy.

When McWhirter was first questioned by the Herald last week, he told the paper that the process had been approved by Health Canada.

According to a statement released to the Herald from Health Canada, they have not approved PRP as a cosmetic procedure.

"We have not assessed this therapy, and we have not received any submissions requesting approval. Treatment options, choices of drugs and their uses, side-effects of drug interactions are the responsibility of health care professionals (doctors, pharmacists, etc.).

"As Health Canada has not assessed this procedure, we cannot comment on risks or concerns. Certain risks are inherent in any procedure involving the injection of a blood product, including accidental contamination of the product during the processing steps."

Later, McWhirter explained that it's the centrifuge process (technology made by a Swiss company called Regen Lab) that is approved by Health Canada, which Health Canada confirmed.

McWhirter admits readily that the PRP process is very new, but he says it's completely safe and there are various studies supporting PRP in cosmetic use.

For instance, in a May 2010 issue, *The Journal of Drugs in Dermatology* (an American publication) released a small study on PRP done by a group of Italian doctors, who treated 23 patients with one session of PRP injections per month from September to December 2008. Patient results were measured on a photograph, patient and doctor satisfaction score, all of which came back with positive or satisfactory results. No serious and persistent side-effects were detected.

McWhirter says he recommends that people only receive the PRP from licensed doctors.

"It's a natural injectable product . . . It's the same type of risks that come with any rejuvenations procedure we have. We take the utmost care to sterilize equipment and other than that there are no other added risks," he says.

Dr. Elizabeth Hall-Findlay, president of the Canadian Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, says she would like to see more research done on PRP therapy before recommending it.

"I've been in practice for almost 30 years and there seems to be something new and great on the market every week . . . I would caution anyone to wait a few years before they jump on a trend," she says.

According to Hall-Findlay, who practices cosmetic plastic surgery in Banff, there are always risks involved with new treatments.

"It's likely there will be complications with Dracula Therapy at some point. Eventually, someone could

contaminate the blood before injecting it back into the patient . . . My advice to people is to let any new therapy go through an experimental stage before signing up," she says.

Unlike popular cosmetic fillers, which can make the face look overly puffy, and Botox, which has a reputation for occasionally making a patient look stunned, PRP takes weeks to fully work and is said to give a natural look to the face.

A session at ReNue costs \$1,000 and McWhirter says he expects the effect to last up to a year.

"Maintenance is variable. People can have it repeated monthly because it is safe and natural. However, the effect will last for years and how long is yet to be determined, quite honestly," he says.

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