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Interview with Dr Barry Lycka & Dr Jon Mendelsohn

Dr Barry Lycka cosmetic dermatologist from Edmonton, Alberta is talking today with

Dr Jon Mendelsohn, Board Certified facial plastic surgeon from Cincinnati, Ohio

Talking today about an exciting new device for facial rejuvenation and skin resurfacing – the Venus Viva.

Welcome, Dr Mendelsohn!

Today we are talking about this new technology which has the potential to be very helpful, but we would like to caution the audience that this is very new, so please hold your comments for a while and also keep listening and discovering more about it for a while. Dr Mendelsohn is one of a select group of US plastic surgeons who are actively testing this new technology as part of the review to gain FDA clearance for use of the device in the US. It's called the Venus Viva and it is described as being a NanoFractional Radio Frequency™ device. They are studying its skin resurfacing component.

Dr Mendelsohn, How long have you been using the technology?

For 8 weeks so far.

And is it right to say that it is similar to existing lasers but it causes less downtime but with equally good results?

Yes. The Venus Viva is used in Europe and we are part of a study for the FDA to get clearance to use it in the US. We feel strongly that it will be approved. We are studying it for the skin resurfacing component. Currently we are managing skin with lasers or peels or other technologies and over the past decade if someone wanted to rejuvenate their phot-aged (sun damaged) skin, brown spots, fine lines and wrinkles, crepiness and so forth, then we would probably take them into the operating room – not to operate – but to do a chemical peel. One that was popular was the Baker Gordon phenol peel. It gave remarkable results but there were risks associated with it (even to the kidneys and heart) and we had no great control over the depth of the peel. The early peels were exciting and gave us results that we couldn't get before but darker skinned people couldn't use them because they could get hypopigmentation (pale patches on their skin). We have gone through evolution with peels, modified them, and also using TCA and Jessner peels.

However, 4 or 5 years ago we were introduced to the fractionated CO₂ laser, the first one being the Fraxel. This was a very exciting development because we no longer had to go into the operating room, no anesthesia was needed. Patients could drive in, have topical anesthesia for around 30 minutes on their skin and then we would treat the skin for 10 minutes. Patients don't look great for about 4 days, but for the phenol peels the downtime was anything between 8 to 20 days. With the CO₂ laser we have a large amount of patient tolerance and if we use PRP (Platelet Rich Plasma which helps healing because it has growth factors in it) with it then we enhance the healing and get the downtime down to a couple of days - " a long weekend and a day" as Dr Lycka calls it. It is a predictable procedure, giving good results which are additive following successive procedures, and it fits in with today's busy lifestyles where no-one has time to take off because of downtime after a procedure. Everyone wants the results without the downtime.

And this is where this latest technology, the Venus Viva, fits in and why it may be very helpful. It is a different technology. The Venus Viva uses radio frequency technology which is nanofractionated. This is an example of how radio frequency devices are evolving. Originally we used Thermage, around 14 years ago it came out, and since then there have been lots of different radio frequency (RF) devices come out, and they are all rather painful. The idea is to tighten the skin (Venus Viva does that), but in comparison to the peels and the fractionated CO₂ lasers, there is also a way to do skin resurfacing.

This is what we are finding with Venus Viva.

Patients come in off the street. We are told that no topical anesthesia is required and we find that about 60 % of patients tolerate it without anesthesia but we do offer it, as it does get a little bit warm. This FDA study is looking at 3 treatments, one week apart, each treatment for the facial area 15 to 17 minutes. There is a little bit of discomfort and as they leave some redness but no peeling, no blood, nothing to do. Patients can even apply makeup afterwards if they want to.

That is what I am hearing – and this is happening when?

It is happening right now, in his hands. There are other doctors also involved on the West coast and in the Cleveland area and what they are finding is that the results are comparable to that achieved with the CO₂ lasers. If that is what we also find then we have moved to the next generation of technology and Dr Mendelsohn hopes that over the next couple of months, his experience proves to be the same.

That is the question mark isn't it? If we can get the same results of a CO₂ laser without the downtime, without the discomfort it sounds like we are progressing into another place.

Dr Lycka is always somewhat hesitant whenever a new technology comes out. Of course, the fractionated laser has also come a long way. Dr Lycka has been using it for about a year and a half – it has a big indication for facial rejuvenation BUT equally exciting is that it is used for scar treatment. It's a new frontier where we can almost take every scar away with the fractionated CO₂ laser. It is really exciting especially when treating bad burn scars, bad trauma scars, really making a difference to people's lives because of it. We can virtually say that with the fractionated CO₂ laser we can practically improve everyone's life – which we were not able to say before.

Therefore it will be really exciting if this new technology can re-create these results. The downside of a CO₂ laser is that it is still somewhat painful and also, of course there is still downtime associated with it.

Dr Mendelsohn is really excited by this, and one of the reasons he wanted to look at this technology is because when working with facelift patients we can improve all the extra skin in the neck area. As you know the neck skin usually does not repair itself as well and it gets more sun damage. As patients start to lose their results we see it in the neck so Dr Mendelsohn is hoping that Venus Viva can help with the outcomes of surgeries too.

Dr Lycka adds that the 'turkey neck' is still one of the biggest problems as the skin loses more elasticity in that area and as yet, even in 2014, we do not have a way to generate elastic fibers and make them come back. We are still not all the way there in being able to make the neck look as good as the face does.

Doctors and patients agree, we are hopeful that we can improve it with the minimum of downtime and minimal discomfort using this new technology device.

Dr Lycka highlights another new technology that is coming out of Europe – micro needling technology using Radio Frequency and also using fractional RF and that might be beneficial. This is not just using lasers or RF but with the addition of many tiny micro needles. The Europeans are talking about this a lot and we are looking to the future with that. Dr Lycka has only been using it for a few weeks and therefore it's too early for any comment on it, although it is simple, fairly painless, he is not sure of the longer term results and is not sure how many times it has to be repeated to get results.

What are you primarily using micro needling for, Dr Lycka?

Facial rejuvenation and also scar treatment – similar to what we are doing with lasers, but the price points might be a bit better because the technology is cheaper and there are no consumable parts, so that might be beneficial as time goes on.

Dr Mendelsohn mentions that he wants to change gears a bit and talk about Voluma.

Are you using Voluma a lot up in Canada, Dr Lycka?

Yes for around a year and a half, it's one of the newer fillers and is used to restore volume and seems to be longer lasting but Dr Lycka is not sure it will make one and a half to two years like some studies have suggested but certainly it seems to be longer lasting than other materials.

The FDA approved its use in US last October and Dr Mendelsohn is very pleased with what it does for replacing lost volume in mid-face and frankly – he is using it all over the face – per cc it does seem to give more volume than others because it is concentrated.

Yes and it doesn't go away at once, it still maintains shape and form even if it is maybe being absorbed by the body it still maintains 'the look' very nicely.

Dr Mendelsohn is very excited about it and what it is now possible to do non-surgically – with all this new technology it is so different from how we used to practice even a decade ago!

Yes, a decade ago we had the facelift and people looked overdone because actually their problem was one of loss of volume. Both doctors agree that being able to restore lost volume has made a nice difference for patients and especially for those who are not ready for, or don't want, surgery. Both do a lot with treating the skin and using injectables, fillers and neuromodulators. As Dr Lycka notes, what we have done is to logically re-visualize and re-conceptualize the problems and now the first thing we look at is the skin itself, if that is damaged and not looking good, if it is not fixed then there is no point in doing anything underneath it. We look at the components and add to our understanding of what the problems are. The advancements in medicine have enabled us to look at things in different ways. Before, we were getting good results, now we are getting much better results. Dr Mendelsohn is excited from a plastic surgeon point of view and excited for his patients in that we can now give them surgery or non-surgical options and skin treatments. Using Venus Viva with Voluma for example.

Both are looking forward to the technology providing treatments with less downtime and even better results, to fillers being even longer lasting. Think back to those early fillers, with collagen being the first in the 1990's. It didn't last long and there were allergy problems. It has been replaced by Hyaluronic Acid (HA) products, and we continue to see further trends in fillers. Radiesse still works well, notes Dr Lycka, in certain areas. He likes using it in the backs of hands because it provides volume without the puffiness that other fillers can cause.

Do you regularly use fillers in the back of hands, Dr Lycka?

Yes, Dr Lycka is getting some nice results with Radiesse there – he prefers to use multiple injection sites and to use a cannula to get better results – in fact results can be very technique dependent.

Dr Mendelsohn loves the HA fillers because they are malleable, soft and easy to work with and of course they have reversible aspects if adjustments are needed. Dr Lycka agrees that not all of the newer fillers are as reversible as they would like them to be, it can take a couple of treatments to get them to dissolve so they can be a little problematic in reversing them if need be.

The experience from Dr Lycka with all of these materials is that we shouldn't just throw out all the materials of years gone by because they can all have a role to play. For example, Dr Lycka also likes to use Radiesse laterally along the jaw and the angle of the jaw because it gives great filling and he prefers to use it over Voluma in that area.

What duration do you get in that area with Radiesse?

16 months – it's a nice longer lasting filler. These are all things that you learn after you have been using a product for a few years, and you will also form your opinion, Jon, with Voluma. Dr Lycka uses them all, but in the nasal labial folds he does not use anything but the HA's in this day and age because of too many risk factors with that area.

And what about lips, Dr Lycka?

We have just got a new one that you will love when you get it – it's called Volbella. It's a material that has been out a couple of months, and Dr Lycka finds it so soft and light it's almost like injecting water, there are no problems with holding and shaping it and it's also nice and light for the tear trough area. It's a Hyaluronic Acid made by the same company that makes Voluma. Dr Mendelsohn appreciates that information and will look out for it. Dr Lycka comments that they may be behind with lasers (in Canada) because they are expensive, but fillers are used readily.

Both doctors are excited about using all of these new technologies and procedures in combinations which causes a multiplicative effect on results. Managing the skin is one of the most valuable things that we can do, both agree.

Any final words on the new Venus Viva laser, Jon?

Stay Tuned! Dr Mendelsohn will be very happy to return and report back on what he is finding. It's well tolerated, patients are excited and he has seen some good early results but further feedback will be coming over the next several months on it. Dr Lycka is keeping his finger on the pulse with this one!

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