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Interview with Dr Barry Lycka & Dr Alan Bauman

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

Dr Alan Bauman, Board Certified hair restoration physician and hair transplant surgeon from Boca Raton, Florida

Talking today about some exciting new hair loss treatments to mark August as being National Hair Loss Awareness Month in the US.

Welcome once again, Dr Bauman!

Today we are talking about the exciting things happening in hair loss treatments. OK, so maybe hair loss doesn't excite everyone – but the many people suffering from it, who come into our offices crying about it - they don't like it at all but the good news is that there are lots that can be done about it these days and so we are going to be talking about those new and exciting things with Alan today.

So, Alan, What is the biggest buzz going on in hair loss at the moment? There is a lot going on and you are at the center of it, with your finger on the pulse so to speak... What's new?

Well there are so many new things – when Dr Bauman looks back at what has been going on in hair loss and hair restoration we now have treatments that are non-chemical, non-invasive, topical therapies, oral treatments, laser light therapy, injectable platelet rich plasma with stem cells and cell therapy, and of course non-invasive hair transplants.

OK – so let's go back to the start ... a young lady comes to see you, her mother had hair loss, she is starting to get a bit thin on top ... what can you do for her?

The very first thing we want to do is reassure her that she is NOT going to go bald. A lot of women come in with this preconception that they will have extensive baldness and that it is going to happen fast. This just is not the case, so we want to reassure them. There will be an evaluation of risk factors – does it run in the family, any medical factors, stress, any changes in medication and so forth, so we evaluate her in the office and lots of things are used to establish a diagnosis.

We want to establish accurate measurement of the problem and one of the most exciting things that Dr Bauman has got his hands on is called the HairCheck Trichometer. It doesn't do any damage to any existing hair, there is no shaving or tattooing and it scientifically evaluates how much hair is growing in a given area of scalp – that is so important now.

Absolutely – it's hard to evaluate clinically and it's also hard to assess what is actually 'normal' for somebody.

True – for example people come in with 'shedding' concerns – is the shedding they are experiencing normal or not? When we do a HairCheck measurement we are really creating a base line. We look at the differences between the permanent zones at the back of the scalp, and also look at the areas of risk at the frontal or temporal zones. We also see what the differences are, what change there is using a microscope to look at the scalp to see if there is a lot of miniaturization or lack of density.

So we establish that there is a problem – let's go through the treatments. So let's look at treatments for female pattern alopecia – that is hair loss that happens because she has the genes in the family that is causing the hair loss.

What are the first hair loss treatments that you would offer?

Very often we start with the 'easy stuff.' Our first line approach would be topical medication or laser light therapy, and we start out with those because they are simple, and easy to use. We get good results with both of these treatments and they can be used either as standalone – either topical treatments or laser light – or in combination.

Let's talk about topical treatments first – which ones do you find most useful?

Well it's been about 30 years since Rogaine™ was FDA approved to treat hair loss and promote hair growth but I will tell you that these women will be the first to tell you that the over the counter Rogaine™ is messy, greasy, gooey and they want something different or they will not put a topical on their scalp – if it messes with their hair – forget about it! As an alternative Dr Bauman has worked closely with a compounding pharmacist up in New York and he has created and put together the recipe for Formula 82M which is a minoxidil containing mixture which also has other ingredients in it to make the minoxidil a lot more user friendly and much more powerful.

Dr Lycka agrees that it is very important – if people will not use a product because they don't like it then there is no point prescribing it!

And the good news is that the Formula 82M minoxidil is not at all like the other minoxidil products - it also has retin A and other products in it and has an almost hair conditioning effect also, so if it gets onto the hair it is not a mess and it is a powerful hair growth stimulator.

When Dr Lycka started using minoxidil and doing research on it back in 1986 at the University of Minnesota it was used at 2% concentration and worked reasonably well but not great. Are you using it at 5% concentration yet?

Well you are part of history there with those early studies Barry, but yes we do recommend 5% to start off with now, twice a day.

And there are also the topical hormones such as progesterone which helps a bit too – have you had any use for those at all Dr Bauman?

Yes we have - we can use topical hormone modulators and it does certainly work – and of course measuring with the Hair Check device – no matter what the treatment – if the patient is consistent with their treatment then we can say for sure, for that woman, what is working and what is not. It's good to be able to tell them that.

So what about some of the oral treatments available?

Well it's a lot more limited for women of child-bearing age because they cannot use Finasteride™ which is the medication the FDA approved as Propecia™. There is a risk of causing birth defects in a male fetus. So we reserve Finasteride™ for women who are post-menopausal and who have had genetic testing to see if they are androgen sensitive. It could be that the androgens are triggering or increasing their hair loss, and Finasteride™ helps out with that.

How readily available is that genetic testing?

Well genetic testing for hair loss is available through physicians who specialize in hair loss as well as through doctors who have trained through Dr Bauman's HairCoachMD program so that they can administer the test, it's actually quite simple, a cheek swab and a few weeks to wait for the results to come back from the lab. It is so important and so helpful. In the early days of Propecia™ they did testing on women but it was 50/50 whether it worked on them (this was in the 1990's) so now with the test we can exclude the women who are not androgen sensitive and therefore only treat the women who are likely to respond to Finasteride™.

So let's look at the laser devices – this has been around for a long time but the question is – does it work?

Absolutely! The low level laser light therapy works to improve hair growth BUT here is the catch – you have to have a follicle there for it to work. Laser light will not regrow a dead follicle from nothing. Also you need to treat it on a regular basis with a powerful device, consistently and you will see an improvement in the thickness and caliber and length of the hair.

Are the home devices any good?

Yes – we love home devices! Years ago we only had the strong powerful units in the office but the good news is that a friend of Dr Bauman's – Dr Mike Rabin – is a very clever inventor and he has invented the LaserCap which is a 'use at home' device which delivers the same power as a clinical office unit in the comfort of your own home. The great thing about LaserCap is that it is powerful, comfortable, completely hands free and while you are wearing it no-one knows that you are getting a laser treatment!

Is it expensive?

Actually the LaserCap is the least expensive treatment over time, because once you own the device, you have it forever. If you are using a prescription topical for example, in a few years you will have spent a few thousand dollars on those. The LaserCap retails at \$3000 but it is the only LaserCap you will ever buy and if you look after it, it will work for 50,000 hours of treatment.

Great – thanks for your answers – I am asking a lot of pointed questions and putting you on the spot because that is what our listeners want to know. When patients come to us, they are afraid. They are afraid that they are going to go bald and are looking for the right answers and unfortunately as you know, Alan, there are a lot of charlatans out there!

Absolutely and unfortunately so many of our patients have tried so many different things that they have never stuck with, have never been evaluated or measured or had photos taken so they didn't even know if the treatments were working and gave up too soon.

It's like any other health program be it weight loss, keeping your muscles strong, being active, whatever the activity is for health and wellness it is a series of small consistent efforts over time and having someone to guide you. For example at Bauman Medical Group, they see over 1000 patients a year who are struggling with a hair loss situation and need help.

Ok so let's say after these topical and oral treatments, the patient is doing OK but really needs something more – what do you suggest next?

The next level of treatment is really the PRP category – it's a really exciting treatment in the realm of cell therapy.

PRP is an acronym for Platelet Rich Plasma and is concentrated growth factor solution which comes from the patient's own blood. PRP treatments have been used in many branches of medicine specialization – medical, cosmetic surgery, skin rejuvenation, orthopedics, professional athletes to avoid surgery in joints & tendons, neurosurgery – almost all areas of medicine are using the growth factors in the platelets to stimulate tissue to repair, rejuvenate, & regenerate. It's very exciting stuff!

When you use PRP do you activate it?

Yes we do, it really depends upon what we are mixing with the PRP. We add things to the PRP to make it work a little bit better and a little bit longer. It's like a 'scaffold' – a bio scaffold that we add to the PRP to give it a boost.

What do you add, Alan?

Dr Bauman adds one called ACell which is an Extra Cellular Matrix (ECM) but the latest and greatest is really the BioD restore category and those are placental derived products that we mix with PRP and we are pretty excited about the placental products. It is human tissue which is donated, from healthy tested donors, sterile harvested that is mixed and injected with the PRP and it seems to enhance the results in hair growth and in keeping the results happening for an extended period of time.

It is very important for people to realize that not all PRP is the same!

It's like making brownies – everyone has their favorite recipe... Dr Bauman has had some really great responses with his 'recipe' for PRP in female hair loss patients and a really strong rejuvenation of hair quality. It's also important for patients to know that they may have to repeat that PRP treatment within a period of time. And of course these treatments all carry over to men too.

And now let's talk a little about the 'gold standard' for hair replacement right now which is the hair transplantation.

Sure! If under the microscope we see that the follicles are just depleted, very thin, and some areas where there are not many numbers of hairs, or a bare spot, we know we are going to need some degree of transplantation to fill that area. The way we do transplantation today is totally different from even 10 years ago. We do it minimally invasively, and it is called FUE – follicular unit extraction.

So what exactly is FUE? We have talked about this before but let's re-examine this subject so our new listeners are on the same page as us.

Sure – in the old days we took a long strip of scalp that contained hair follicles and closed that gap with stitches. That was how we got the donor hair from the back of the scalp. Then we dissected it under the microscope into skin grafts before transplanting. So we could get down to groups of 1,2,3 hairs no problem for implantation, so it made the procedure viable for many women. But today many men and lots of women do not want this type of invasive work and they don't want the scar either.

The latest technology allows us to harvest at individual hair grafts literally one hair at a time from the back of the scalp so it leaves no scar and recovery time is faster and less uncomfortable, less restrictive – patients can be back at the gym, or playing golf or tennis in 3 days.

That's amazing and such a big change from previously.

It has been a paradigm shift in the industry and unfortunately not all doctors understand the technique and not all use it. Some doctors who have not actually done a hair transplant are going out and buying the devices and that's a scary thought in itself. For those of us who do hair transplants day in, day out, the use of FUE has been a 'god send' for us and the patients. Giving them a full result without a linear scar is just an awesome feeling! It gives a natural result and FUE is 99% of what Dr Bauman does and he actually uses the Neograft device to perform it and uses it every single day.

Dr Bauman has a full team built around this. To do a satisfactory hair transplant procedure he needs a full team of people – he is blessed with his team and they have been with him for over a decade. They help the patient get comfortable, deals with the local anesthetic, help with harvesting and so forth. Dr Bauman does the design of the hair line and all the sites where the hair is going to be implanted. He has to determine the angle, orientation, position of the hair follicles so the end result is 100% natural and undetectable. It is a 20 man hour job to do a hair transplant today.

This is not just a science – it is also very much an art. That makes the difference for a great hair transplant surgeon – not only do they love it, and have the knowledge, but they have to have that artistic eye plus a lot of effort and energy.

Dr Bauman considers himself a student of the natural hair line – he appreciates it in people that don't need surgery to get ideas on how to help other patients who need their hair restored. He has done over 7000 hair transplants and he can say that there has never been a hair line that has been the same. All the hairlines he has done shape the face differently, are different in size, - each procedure is a unique experience and that is part of the fun of it – that is what keeps us going every day!

Dr Lycka is just back from St Petersburg, Russia and the best part of the journey was time spent at the Hermitage Museum, looking at the great artists and how they portrayed beauty – a life changing event and it helps him to do his work even better. Always ask your prospective doctor what they do to study beauty – it is a really important concept.

And it is really scary that physicians who don't specialize in hair are starting to move into the field and they will do a hair transplant per month or so and that is a scary thought for the patients who are having a permanent and highly visible procedure done. So that is why we warn patients over again – do your homework, check out the surgeon, their scope and body of work, and look for patients similar to yourself and make sure that your doctor can show you results and explain the results and that goes for whatever procedure you are thinking of – not just hair restoration.

We have a couple of minutes left, Alan – let's look around the corner and see what's coming out in the next couple of years...

Well with hair loss there are always little step changes, and breakthroughs happening every year.

Sometimes Dr Bauman hopes that hair cloning is just around the corner, and he gets all wrapped up in it – it is the 'holy grail' of hair transplantation to have an unlimited supply of hair follicles and that really would be the end all and be all for hair restoration patients. It is pretty exciting but he is not sure if we will actually see it within the next 5 to 10 years.

With little steps we will move towards the bio-engineering of the hair follicle and gain a much better understanding of what messages the hair follicles use to actually signal the cells to grow a hair. We can duplicate some of these cells in a petrie dish but it seems that as we go to implant them into the body they seem to lose their ability to get organized

so a lot of the research is being concentrated upon these ‘messengers’, those growth factors, which are the molecules that the cells use to communicate with each other. We will see much more of that!

It is complicated – no doubt about that, but the good news is that we have great treatments available TODAY to help.

As we said before, there are also unfortunately plenty of charlatans about out there with their snake oil for patients to be aware of. Patients must do their research, find doctors that are certified in hair transplantation surgery or hair restoration, who are members of the educational society, affiliated to the International Alliance of Hair Restoration Surgeons, or the International Society of Hair Transplant Surgeons.

One pearl of advice for listeners – doctors who are good at what they do, don’t just do it – they also teach it and share their knowledge. Good doctors love to share.

Yes, Barry that’s very true. We spend a lot of time, effort, and energy travelling around the country giving classes, even to primary care physicians who want to help their hair loss patients a little bit better, they won’t be doing hair transplants but they will be able to guide their patients better and even use some of the non-invasive therapies to treat them and to help them to keep on track. That is what Dr Bauman calls the HairCoachMD program – it is a very popular program with over 80 graduates right now – and he travels all over the country seeing physicians to teach them the tools of the trade.

That is a nice note to end our time today, Alan, especially since this month (August 2014) in the United States it is actually Hair Loss Awareness Month.

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