

# New hope for Wound Patients



## *Getting back to living!*

For more than two years, Gainesville native Sally Adams Smith has been living with a wound that won't heal. First diagnosed with cervical cancer in 1984, Sally has battled cancer for many years from cervical, to vulvular, to anal cancer. She has undergone several pelvic surgeries and radiation therapy, which has placed her cancer into remission, but because of the high intensity of the treatment and the sensitive area that was treated, Sally was left with a wound that would not heal.

"We had been treating Sally for several years for severe irritation, pain and discomfort in the region," says James Leigh, Jr., MD, medical director of Wound Healing Services at Northeast Georgia Medical Center (NGMC) and a general surgeon with The Longstreet Clinic. "Sitting was even uncomfortable for her. We tried everything we could, but it did not seem to cure the wound. When the Wound Healing Center obtained the new Hyperbaric Oxygen (HBO) chambers this summer, I knew she would be a perfect candidate for it."

HBO is a painless way to help a

patient heal. HBO chambers surround a patient with 100 percent oxygen at a higher than normal atmospheric pressure, allowing oxygen to pass more easily through the plasma into the wounds to heal them.

Sally, the third patient treated with HBO at NGMC, began her treatment in November 2007. She had 60 treatments each lasting about 140 minutes.

"I was nervous about getting into the HBO chamber the first time," says Sally. "I was afraid that I would get claustrophobic, but I was actually OK. I usually tried to take a nap or watch TV during my treatments, but I knew Catherine, the hyperbaric nurse, was right there if I needed anything. She was a wonderful comfort during my treatments."

Sally's last treatment was on February 27, 2008.

"I was so hopeful that something would heal me, or at least give me some relief," says Sally. "At the very least, I wanted to not have to sit on a donut all the time! My pain level has gone from a eight, on a one to 10

point scale, to almost a zero, which is awesome."

Since her treatment, Sally has been much more physically active. She is able to work in her yard, lift things she couldn't lift before, walk, exercise, go shopping with her stepdaughter, swim and play with her dogs.

"I can get in the swimming pool and swim again," says Sally. "I used to love to swim, and this will be the first time in two years that I have been able to get in a pool and the first time in three years to get into the ocean!"

Sally and her husband, Brad, have been married for a year and went on a second honeymoon to Florida this March following her treatments.

"This has been a life-changing event for me," says Sally. "It is amazing to know that science has come so far that it can help do this for someone who has had problems for so long. I am so thankful that my diagnosis and situation met the criteria for HBO treatment."



# The Wound Healing Center at Northeast Georgia Medical Center

In September 2007, the Wound Healing Center at Northeast Georgia Medical Center (NGMC) began offering Hyperbaric Oxygen (HBO) treatment as an option for patients with nonhealing wounds.

Nonhealing wounds are a serious problem for many people, including the elderly, people with mobility impairments and people with chronic medical conditions such as diabetes.

“There are people who literally live with a painful wound for months at a time with no improvement,” says Leigh Pascucelli, RN, CWOCN, operations manager for the Wound Healing Center.

HBO treatment has proven to be effective for diabetes-related ulcers, radiation wounds, facial injuries, compromised flap or skin grafts and other chronic nonhealing wounds.

## How it works

Hyperbaric treatment helps promote wound healing by increasing levels of blood oxygen. During treatment, a patient lies in an HBO chamber that is gradually pressurized to surround him/her with 100 percent oxygen.

This painless technique increases the amount of oxygen in a patient’s blood, allowing oxygen to more easily pass through the plasma into the wounds to heal them.

A treatment plan will vary according to a patient’s diagnosis. In general, a program lasts 90 minutes to two hours per treatment for anywhere from 20 to 60 treatments.

“Previously, a patient would have had to travel to Atlanta for HBO treatment,” says James Leigh, Jr., MD, medical director of Wound Healing Services at NGMC and a general surgeon with The Longstreet Clinic. “Because of the large time commitment already required for a successful HBO treatment, we are especially thankful to be able to offer this treatment closer to home.”

## Patient Experience

“We like to discuss with patients what they might experience during treatments,” says Dr. Leigh. “Claustrophobia can be an issue for some people, as well as their tolerance of the increases or decreases in

## National Healing’s Top 5 diagnoses for HBO treatment

- Diabetic ulcers
- Tissue damage from radiation therapy
- Bone infections that last longer than 6 months
- Compromised muscle flaps and skin grafts after surgery
- Osteoradionecrosis from radiation of the jaw bone



pressure.”

There are many steps that have been taken to ensure a patient's comfort during HBO treatment. The HBO chambers are clear to allow patients to watch television while having their treatments as well as to help anxious or claustrophobic patients. In addition, the nurse is in constant communication with a patient while he or she is in the chamber.

Usually, a patient undergoing HBO will experience mild pressure as the chamber compresses or decompresses. This feeling is similar to that associated with flying in an airplane and can usually be alleviated by patients simply “popping” their ears. Because of this side effect, a physician at the Wound Healing Center will check a patient's ears during the pre-treatment and post treatment physical each time they are treated.

### Who is eligible?

To be considered as a candidate for HBO, a patient must meet specific criteria in relation to the wound and its treatment and have been under a doctor's care for a nonhealing wound for at least 30 days.

One test that must be conducted on each patient to determine if they are a good candidate for treatment is the oxygen challenge. In this test, a patient is tested using transcutaneous oximetry. This is a method to test the body's response to oxygen using sensors placed around a potential patient's wound to determine if they will benefit from HBO treatment.

**For more information about HBO, call your doctor or the Wound Healing Center at 678-343-4963.**

“The chamber is often a last resort,” says Pascucelli. “We first assess why the wound is not healing including nutrition, vascular issues, medications and patient history. Once these indicators have been addressed and ruled out, we will consider a patient for HBO.”

### The Wound Healing Center's Approach

Hyperbaric treatment is just one

option at the Wound Healing Center. The Wound Healing Center also offers compression therapy, biological grafts and other wound care modalities. In addition to wound care, the center offers ostomy services to care for patients who have had surgery to add ostomies following gastrointestinal or genitourinary tract disease. These patients are often marked before surgery and receive ongoing education post surgery.

A panel of cross-trained physicians oversees the Wound Healing Center and coordinates care with patients' primary care physicians when applicable. Patients can refer themselves to the center if they do not have a primary care physician.

The Wound Healing Center has partnered with National Healing, Inc. to oversee the wound care and hyperbaric treatments. The center follows a clinical pathway based on best practices and compares its wound healing outcomes nationally with other wound healing centers. National Healing centers maintain an 89 percent heal rate within 16 weeks and maintain an amputation rate of less than 2 percent. The average heal time of a wound is seven weeks.

## Hospice of NGMC

When Kaye Carlton learned late last year she had terminal skin cancer, she asked to be admitted to Hospice of Northeast Georgia Medical Center. She and her family have been pleased with her decision. The care and support she and her family have received through Hospice of NGMC nurses, volunteers and social workers have enabled them to make the most of the time they have together.

Hospice of NGMC is the area's only not-for-profit hospice program and has been caring for terminally ill patients and their families throughout northeast Georgia for 21 years. For more information on Hospice of NGMC services and volunteer opportunities, call 770-533-8888 or 1-800-572-3900.



“Hospice can make a huge difference in those last months. It can make the quality of life so much better,” Kaye says. “We are so grateful that I've had this time.” **Kaye Carlton**



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