

Skin transplant offers new hope for vitiligo patients

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Henry Ford Hospital dermatologists say skin transplant surgery is safe and effective for restoring skin pigmentation caused by the skin disease vitiligo.

In a first study of its kind in the United States, researchers followed 23 patients for up to six months after [surgery](#) and found that the treated area regained on average 43 percent of its natural skin color. In eight patients with localized [vitiligo](#), the treated area regained on average 68 percent of its natural skin color.

The surgery involves using skin cells taken from healthy, normally pigmented areas of the body and transferring them to the damaged area of skin. It is performed under local anesthesia.

The study is published in the May edition of the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*. It is available online at [http://www.eblue.org/article/S0190-9622\(11\)00527-5/abstract](http://www.eblue.org/article/S0190-9622(11)00527-5/abstract).

"The results achieved in our study were of obvious significance to our patients," says Iltefat Hamzavi, M.D., a senior staff physician in Henry Ford's Department of Dermatology and the study's senior author and principal investigator. "We believe this new treatment option offers hope to patients of color and those with vitiligo on one side of the body or in one area of the body."

Vitiligo is a skin disease that causes the skin to lose color and develop

white patches that vary in size and location. It affects about 1 in every 200 people in the United States, and is more noticeable in people with darker skin. Standard treatments include light therapy and topical medications.

Vitiligo develops when cells called melanocytes are killed by the body's immune system, causing the area of skin to turn white because the cells no longer make pigment. While there is no cure, vitiligo can be treated and managed with light therapy, creams and topical medications.

The surgery is known as melanocyte-keratinocyte transplantation, or MKTP, and is performed in Europe, Asia and the Middle East. It was performed at Henry Ford using the same technique developed by MKTP pioneer Sanjeev Mulekar, M.D., of the National Vitiligo Center in Saudi Arabia. Henry Ford is the first to perform MKTP in North America.

In Henry Ford's study, 28 patients underwent surgery and ranged in age from 18 to 60. A total of 36 MKTP procedures were performed and researchers analyzed the outcomes of 29 of them. The procedure lasted 30 minutes to two hours and patients returned home the same day.

Of the 28 surgery patients, 23 were followed for up to six months after surgery. Eighteen patients received one treatment, four patients received two and one patient received three. The ethnicity of patients was Caucasian, South Asian, African American and Hispanic.

During MKTP, melanocyte cells, which produce pigment in the skin, hair and eyes, are harvested from an area of healthy skin and separated to make a [skin](#) cell mixture. This mixture then is applied to the treatment area and covered with a specially developed adhesive biologic dressing.

Treated areas included the hands, arms, legs, feet, face and stomach. The average size of the treated area during each procedure was 46 cm², or

roughly the size of a credit card.

Provided by Henry Ford Health System

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