

Dr. Milton Waner excels in the treatment of vascular birthmarks (Photos)

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In late 2004, Geoff Ritchie walked into Dr. Milton Waner's office for the first time. In the years prior, visits with other doctors had been disappointing at best. He was hoping for better news. He wanted someone to tell him, "There *is* something we can do." Dr. Waner quickly proved himself to be a powerful ally in the fight against Ritchie's port wine stain.

Port wine stains, like all



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vascular malformations, are surprisingly complex conditions. You cannot just "cut them off." They contain a massive tangle of blood vessels. One misstep, and the patient could bleed to death.

The risk is high, but the rewards are just as impressive. Dr. Waner has treated countless patients like Ritchie, who once thought they had no options. The talented and innovative physician took the time to reveal insider information, and why he would continue his work, even if he made no money.

1. What sets you apart from other physicians in your specialty?

I'm the only person in the world who exclusively treats vascular anomalies. As with any specialty, the exclusive nature of my practice generates better results and a decrease in recurrences.

It's also a labor of passion. This is my life and my passion. I am endlessly fascinated by these

cases. I love that I can help people, and the work is so visual. I can see the results for myself. If I didn't get paid, I'd still do it.

2. Why did you decide to practice as a surgeon who treats vascular birthmarks and tumors as opposed to other specialties?

I essentially fell into it. I started out wanting to be a head and neck cancer surgeon. I completed my fellowship in Cincinnati with Leon Goldman, the father of lasers. It was during this time that I witnessed him treat port wine stains. Following his fellowship, I worked in Australia using the copper vapor laser. With my laser and surgical experience, other physicians began referring their patients to me. From there, I began to develop new solutions for vascular malformations. I am a very out-of-the-box thinker, which is immensely useful in my field.

3. You treat hemangiomas, venous malformations, lymphatic malformations, arterio-venous malformations, port wine stains, and Klippel Trenaunay Syndrome. What are the differences between these conditions?

All of these conditions involve the blood vessels. But there are some distinct differences:

- ▶ Hemangiomas are benign tumors in the cells lining the blood vessels.
- ▶ Venous malformations occur when the veins are excessive in number or when the veins do not form properly.
- ▶ Lymphatic malformations include

poorly formed spaces within the lymph system, resulting in poor circulation of lymph fluid and swelling.

- Arteriovenous malformations involve an excess in the number of blood vessels and arteries as well as blood vessels and arteries that are poorly formed.
- A port wine stain describes a condition in which the patient's capillaries are enlarged, causing a dark red color and even cobblestones in the affected area.
- Klippel-Trenaunay Syndrome is a combination of the above conditions.

4. What factors determine a laser versus an excision treatment?

The answer here is simple. We use a laser for superficial lesions, while surgery is necessary for deeper lesions. Sometimes, we even utilize both during treatment.

5. Excluding monetary rewards, what have you gained from your work?

I have such a rewarding job. I love being able to help people. I can apply my skills to my job, and I see the fruits of my endeavor right before my very eyes.

6. What was your most memorable case and why?

I had a patient who came to my office, and she

was from overseas. She was so disfigured that she was unable to go to school. In just one operation, I eliminated the problem, and she now wants to be a movie star. I've even saved lives. I get a lot of thank you letters, too. One child wrote me a particularly gratifying note that I'll never forget.

7. What is your biggest challenge as a surgeon?

To get better, prevent complications, and train others.

8. Have there been any recent advances in treatments for vascular birthmarks and tumors?

We recently discovered that Propranolol, an existing drug for high blood pressure, works on kids with hemangiomas.

9. What do you think future treatments will entail?

I think we will find better drugs to do a lot more of what we do. I think we'll also utilize early prevention with medication.

10. Is there anything else people should know about vascular malformations?

These vascular anomalies are not simply cosmetic problems. Every child has the right to look and feel normal. We're trying to get these children to look and feel that way. Each surgery that I perform is a corrective surgery, not a cosmetic one.

Dr. Waner is leading the way in his field. Though vascular anomalies are a formidable enemy, he is more determined than ever to win the fight.

These malformations are, after all, so much more than skin deep.

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