



## Researchers at Northwestern Memorial Test Effectiveness of New Topical Drug to Treat Keloid Scars

02/21/2005 - Researchers at Northwestern Memorial Hospital and Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine are looking for approximately 25 female volunteers to participate in a clinical trial to test the effectiveness of a new topical gel to treat keloid scars and prevent their reoccurrence. Keloid scars are raised, reddish nodules that can develop beyond the site of just about any skin injuries, such as surgical incisions, traumatic wounds, vaccination sites, burns, chickenpox, acne or even minor scratches.

"It is estimated that keloid scars occur in about 10 percent of the population, affecting more Hispanics and African Americans than other populations," explains James Swan, MD, a dermatologist at Northwestern Memorial Hospital, assistant professor of dermatology at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine and principal investigator on this study. "Keloid scars are often much more than a cosmetic nuisance, for the majority they cause severe pain and itchiness."

Keloid scarring can be a debilitating process, resulting in multiple treatments, excisions, and office visits for the patient. "However, there is currently no long-term cure," explains Julius Few, MD, a plastic surgeon at Northwestern Memorial Hospital and assistant professor of Plastic Surgery at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine. "Keloids and symptomatic scars affect several million people in the United States each year, causing aesthetic and functional deficits for the patient. I see patients on a daily basis who are suffering from keloids and are unable to find long-term relief."

Doctors theorize that keloid scars are the result of an overly active healing process: after a wound has occurred to the skin, both skin cells and fibroblasts (connective tissue cells) begin multiplying to repair the damage. A scar is made up of fibroblasts to hold the wound closed. With keloids, the fibroblasts continue to multiply even after the wound is filled in. Thus, keloids project above the surface of the skin and form large mounds of scar tissue.

Keloids may form on any part of the body, although the earlobes, upper chest, shoulders and upper back are especially prone to keloid formation. Symptoms include pigmentation of the skin, itchiness, redness, unusual sensations and pain.

This research is randomized, double-blind and placebo-controlled trial: half of the volunteers will receive placebo and half will receive the study medication which is applied as a gel on the surface of the skin.

Participation in the study will last at least six months and will involve six visits to Northwestern and four telephone visits. Participants will be asked to complete a diary; talk about their keloid pain, discomfort and/or itching; have their scars examined and measured; and undergo two biopsies and an electrocardiogram. The study is seeking volunteers meet the following criteria.

- Females, 18 years of age or older.
- Must have at least one keloid scar (between 1.0 and 6.0 cm in length and up to 3.0 cm in width) for at least three months.

- Keloid scar must have been symptomatic for at least one month.
- At least three months have passed since participants have received steroid injection.
- Participants who are otherwise in good health.

Those interested in participating in this trial should call 312-926-8400 for more information.

### **About Northwestern Memorial Hospital**

Northwestern Memorial Hospital is one of the country's premier academic medical centers and is the primary teaching hospital of Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine. Northwestern Memorial and its Prentice Women's Hospital and Stone Institute of Psychiatry have 744 beds and more than 1,200 affiliated physicians and 5,000 employees. Providing state-of-the-art care, Northwestern Memorial is recognized for its outstanding clinical and surgical advancements in such areas as cardiothoracic and vascular care, gastroenterology, neurology and neurosurgery, oncology, organ and bone marrow transplantation, and women's health.

Northwestern Memorial was ranked as the nation's 5th best hospital by the 2002 Consumer Checkbook survey of the nation's physicians and is listed in the majority of specialties in this year's US News & World Report's issue of "America's Best Hospitals." The hospital is also cited as one of the "100 Best Companies for Working Mothers" by Working Mother magazine and has been chosen by Chicagoans year after year as their "most preferred hospital" in National Research Corporation's annual survey.

For more information, please contact [Patty Keiler](#) - (312) 926.5900

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