

VENICE PLASTIC SURGERY

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Cosmetic, Reconstructive, Face, Breast, and Hand Surgery

Wounds - When they are not wounds

Wounds most often result from trauma. It may be a bad fall, a car accident or just a simple little bump or brushing against something. There are other, less obvious sources as cancer, foreign substances as a retained splinter, infected cyst or mole, underlying diseases as AIDS or diabetes or lupus, insect bites such as a brown recluse spider.

On occasion a patient is sent to me because of a wound that does not heal after the usual treatments. A patient comes to mind who had a small wound on the left facial cheek area. Most facial injuries or wounds heal fast because the circulation is very good in the face. This was a middle aged patient who told me that he hit himself in the face with a wrench a few months ago. It broke open and just did not heal. He was sent to me by another reconstructive plastic surgeon for a second opinion. I thought it could be a cyst that just did not heal as it became infected on a recurrent basis. I was wrong.

We excised the area and sent it to the laboratory for analysis. This was a good lesson for me as to why I always insist that things be sent to the lab. The report revealed that what we thought was a non-healing cyst was actually a rare type of skin cancer called a Merkel Cell Carcinoma. This can be worse than a Malignant Melanoma. To make a long story short, the patient died of this cancer just 3 months later.

Another patient came because of an infected nodule on the buttock. It was drained by their regular doctor but became increasingly more painful and had not healed for about two months. I was told the "cyst" was on the buttock for many years but only recently became red, painful and infected looking. We sent it to the laboratory. The pathologist found it to be a cancer. My feeling was that this patient had a benign cyst for years that went bad and changed into a cancer. It was another bad cancer.

The point is that all wounds are not just wounds. They may be many different things. People always give themselves the excuse that it was always there, that they just bumped it and it is nothing or that they were told it was just a mole by their regular doctor. Remember that things that may have been nothing to worry about in the past may change into something very bad indeed. Perfectly healthy people may develop new health problems at any time.

My favorite story is that of an overweight man who came because of a nose laceration that did not heal. I stitched it up and sent him home. He was late middle aged and never before saw a doctor. He lived in a shack in the woods. Well I ordered some baseline lab tests and referred him to the family practice clinic for a general medical going over. That night the laboratory called to inform me that the patient had very abnormal lab tests. He had totally out of control diabetes even though he thought he was in good health. There was no phone so I sent the sheriff to his place in the woods. They brought him back to the hospital because he suddenly was feeling bad . He ended up in the ICU and began treatment for diabetes that probably would have killed him shortly. It was the diabetic wound that led to the diagnosis and life saving treatment.

**The above represents the opinion of A. E. Haas, M.D.
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Just call us directly. No referral needed unless required by your insurance company

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