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GentleYAG Skin Tightening Competes with Surgery

A growing number of physicians are finding that the GentleYAG long pulsed, 1064 nm Nd:YAG laser from Candela Corporation (Wayland, Mass.) is very effective for skin tightening. "In my practice, radiofrequency technology was not achieving the results that patients were counting on. Radiofrequency is also associated with some safety issues, including facial fat loss," reported Benjamin Bassichis, M.D., director of the Advanced Facial Plastic Surgery Center in Dallas, Texas. "We were looking for technology that would provide collagen regeneration without the downside of

Photos courtesy of Mark Taylor, M.D.



Before Tx



After GentleYAG Tx

potential, serious side effects. The GentleYAG is a perfect device for this application, and actually penetrates into the dermis layer of the skin."

For skin tightening with the GentleYAG, Dr. Bassichis schedules four treatment sessions, spaced three to four weeks apart. An average session lasts 45 minutes. "We normally start with a painting technique using the 10 mm spot size at 12 J/cm² for 1,000 pulses with a 0.45 pulse width," he explained. "We then switch to the 8 mm spot at 12 J/cm² with a 0.25 pulse width for the remaining four to five thousand pulses." No cryogen skin cooling is administered to these patients. However, some patients also require tightening along their jawline with higher energy and cryogen cooling.

"Maximum results are seen 90 days after the fourth session," said Dr. Bassichis, an assistant clinical professor of facial plastic surgery at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center.

"Patients really like the GentleYAG because it decreases their fine lines, provides a smoother texture, and subjectively decreases pore size. Patients feel like their makeup applies smoother." A maintenance treatment is suggested once every 12 to 18 months.

"**There is no downtime** or risk for serious side effects," Dr. Bassichis noted. "The cost is also less for the patient. We charge \$250 per treatment or \$750 for a package of four treatments. This compares to \$2,000 to \$4,000 for radiofrequency treatment."

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Circulation: 16,000

Rhytec Launches PSR	6
Aesthetic Forum	9
FDA Approves GentleWaves	11
OmniLux Clinical Results	15
Cynosure's Cynergy III	24
LumiPhase-R LED Tx	34
Photopneumatic Therapy	53
Profect Acne System	57
Newest Cosmeceuticals	86
Levulan Clinical Research	110



Robert Weiss, M.D.

AAD Show Report
.....
Page 36

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Michael Elder, M.D., is an anesthesiologist who also co-owns Advanced Aesthetics in Oklahoma City, Okla. "We primarily use the GentleYAG for hair removal," he said. "But its ability to tighten skin has just been tremendous." Patients are treated at one month intervals, typically three to four times. "We're treating mostly the face and the chest. A normal session



Before Tx

After GentleYAG Tx

Photos courtesy of Benjamin Bassichis, M.D.

lasts less than 30 minutes. Most patients achieve results that improve with each consecutive treatment. A 60% to 70% improvement in quality of skin and tightness can be expected after a series of treatments, as long as the wrinkles are fairly small. Although a surgical facelift is probably the gold standard, it is also the most expensive and has higher complications and risks. Anesthesia certainly adds risk to a facelift. In addition, nearly all patients require some downtime."

Dr. Elder's typical patient is a woman between the age of 38 and 55 who has a fair skin complexion that tends to age more rapidly. "Especially in Oklahoma, there is a lot of sun exposure," he said. "These women are interested in a non-surgical alternative to facial rejuvenation. It has been easy to market the procedure. By sharing our before and after photos, we've been able to generate quite a bit of excitement. We seem to achieve results very, very rapidly with the GentleYAG."

"The GentleYAG gives us a whole new venue to treat our patients," said William Clearfield, D.O., who has a family practice in Wilkes-Barre, Penn. "Previously, patients would have to go to a plastic surgeon or have some surgical procedure. In contrast, the GentleYAG is an in-office procedure with no downtime and with relatively no side effects." Dr. Clearfield, who treats the face and abdomen, schedules up to four sessions spaced four to six weeks apart. A typical session lasts between 20 and 40 minutes.



During a treatment session, Dr. Clearfield targets three areas: skin tightening, wrinkle reduction and facial rejuvenation. "I start with skin tightening," he explained. "I use the 10 or 12 mm spot size and a 50 ms pulse. I also begin at a fluence of 50 J/cm², then sometimes back down. The repetition rate is 1 Hz and the setting for the dynamic cooling device is moderate." Facial rejuvenation is performed second with an 8 or 10 spot, beginning at a 0.5 ms pulse and a fluence of usually 12 J/cm². "The repetition rate is 5 Hz, but we don't apply any cooling," Dr. Clearfield said. For wrinkle reduction, he typically uses a 10 spot, 3 ms pulse, 30 J/cm², 1 Hz and moderate to high cooling.

"Results are good. There is a noticeable difference after the first treatment," Dr. Clearfield conveyed. "It has been very easy to integrate the GentleYAG into our practice. We're seeing about ten patients per week. Patients are bringing their friends, and we're getting a lot of word-of-mouth referrals. There is very little discomfort. If there is, we reduce the fluence. Of all the lasers, the GentleYAG is extremely versatile. You can also treat acne scars. As a first step into the world of lasers, I believe the GentleYAG is the way to go."

"Using the GentleYAG for skin tightening is a very popular procedure at our institution," said Mark Taylor, M.D., owner of Gateway Aesthetic Institute and Laser Center in Salt Lake City, Utah. Last year, Dr. Taylor and his associates conducted a split-face study on seven patients comparing the long pulsed YAG to radiofrequency. "We found that the GentleYAG worked as well, or better, in all the patients," he stated. "For the group as a whole, we observed 30% improvement with the YAG laser, compared to only about a 15% improvement with radiofrequency. There is also less patient discomfort with the laser. In my opinion, the laser disperses its heat in the dermis before it heats up the periosteum. So treatment is less painful over the bones."



Mark B. Taylor, M.D.

Study patients underwent one treatment only, then were followed for a maximum of six months. "But today, we try to schedule a series of treatments about one month apart to achieve maximum tightening," Dr. Taylor noted. "The protocol is similar to a photofacial, with about five sessions. We typically do three intersecting passes and treating the full face takes about 20 minutes. We've also successfully treated stretch marks, scars, necks, abdomens and thighs. For some stretch marks and some facial laxity, we've seen an improvement up to 40% to 60%."