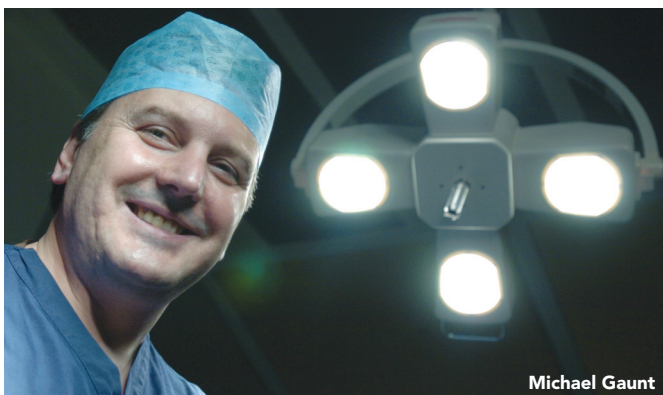


LET'S THINK ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE

Like a lot of people with varicose veins, I spend as little time as possible thinking about my condition. We're born with pumps at the top of our legs that circulate the blood through the veins, but some folks – I'm one of them – get pumps that aren't quite up to the job, with the result that the blood that is sent to your legs doesn't all come back up. Some of this blood then stays in your legs, swelling the veins. They then become known as tortured veins.

I had my veins stripped in my mid-20s. It's a totally barbaric operation which involves cutting you at the top and bottom of your legs and ripping the offending veins out. It took me ten days to learn how to walk again and, frankly, having now learned how to walk twice in my lifetime and I don't fancy it a third time.

In any case the NHS no longer does this operation. Your legs have to be gangrenous for the NHS to intervene these days, and I'd put the whole thing to the back of my mind until I heard that there's a laser surgery procedure which is now a viable option. And no wonder – you walk in, have a local anaesthetic and walk out again a couple of hours later. The procedure is carried out by Michael Gaunt, an award-winning consultant vascular surgeon at Addenbrooke's Cambridge Vascular Unit and at West Suffolk Hospital in Bury St Edmunds. He works closely with the local representatives of the German-designed laser equipment and has published many scientific papers on all aspects of peripheral vascular disease, varicose veins and carotid artery disease – his work has received research grants from organisations including the Stroke Association.



Michael Gaunt

I first met Mr Gaunt in 2006 when I was referred by my GP. He recommended undergoing the procedure within a year but it wasn't until this summer that I was ready to take the plunge. The second meeting at Spire Cambridge Lea Hospital in Impington set a tone which was hugely reassuring – distressed veins were most prominent. A non-intrusive examination revealed that the condition hadn't markedly worsened – which I knew, because I spent a lot of time

wearing stockings (including in the summer, which has meant I'm rarely seen in shorts and my legs are whiter than any Persil ad could portray). Also, following Mr Gaunt's advice, I'd been spending 20 minutes a day with my legs in the air so the blood flows back towards the skull – I can totally understand how Dan Brown wrote large chunks of *The Da Vinci Code* while hanging upside down wearing gravity boots, reversing the usual blood flow is actually a very energising experience.

A couple of weeks later and I was being wheeled in to the operating theatre under a local anaesthetic. My left leg (the worse one first, the other on another occasion) was entirely numb after the excellent work of Dr Bass the anaesthetist and I was fully conscious throughout, so much so that at one point I felt confident enough to look down and see Mr Gaunt pecking away at my leg – and felt no pain, it was like watching an operation on a monitor. The pain came later, when the venflon stuck to my arm came off: it hadn't been shaved and, expertly done though it was, I yelped involuntarily.



Before



Less than a week later

A few hours later, at home, I was pacing around in the late afternoon sun. The next day I walked into town and the following day I cut the bandage off in the bath, put on a stocking, and walked the three miles to work and back.

The cost involves Mr Gaunt's fee and the charge levied by Cambridge Lea for the use of their facilities. You get what you pay for – it's a superbly run hospital with 63 very agreeable single rooms. I was there for about eight hours and everyone who I came into contact with – the ward staff, my personal nurse Sue, everyone in theatre, the physiotherapist, the tea lady . . . all of them were first-rate professionals with a very positive manner.

Laser treatment is on the cutting edge of medical science, and it's making a very valuable contribution to the overall scheme of things. If you've got varicose veins or even just thread veins there's a world-class option right on your doorstep.

And now I'm off to buy a new pair of shorts for a nice summer holiday. *MS*

Further information at www.michaelgaunt.com or on (01223) 305858.