

## Lasers, Tricorders and NAALT



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We of the Star Trek generation have been fascinated, not only by the starships featured in the TV series, but also by the "tricorder," an energetic healing device able to diagnose and rapidly resolve many conditions. It is easy for me to imagine low-level laser therapy as the heart of the therapeutic portion of the tricorder. As I have come to use this therapy, I have seen function restored and tissue seemingly regenerated time and again in a wide variety of conditions, many of which might have been untreatable by other means.

People often ask, "What can one treat with low-level laser therapy?" I believe the answer might be, "Nearly anything." **If laser therapy can be delivered at an appropriate dosage and wavelength to the target, hypofunctional cells and tissue are likely to accept and use this energy to rejuvenate and to restore function.** Like charging a battery, laser therapy re-energizes depleted cells and tissues.

Therapeutic applications supported by studies include:

- acne;
- arthritis;
- back pain;
- carpal tunnel syndrome;
- cerebral palsy;
- dental applications;
- fibromyalgia;
- hearing disorders;
- herpes;

- lymphedema;
- maxillofacial disorders;
- nerve regeneration;
- neuralgia;
- neuropathy;
- pain (musculoskeletal, myofascial, nerve);
- Peyronie's disease;
- prostatitis;
- scars;
- sinusitis;
- Sjogren's syndrome;
- skin disorders;
- sports injuries;
- tendonitis; and
- wound healing.

All lasers are not created equal. Anyone who has not achieved positive outcomes with therapeutic lasers has likely given too low a dose. A five-milliwatt laser pen will be inadequate for most applications, while higher-powered, Class III-B instruments are far more likely to achieve positive outcomes. If you are considering adding laser therapy to your practice, please be aware of the differences in power and wavelengths of available equipment, and study the techniques and parameters likely to give favorable outcomes.

Why do lasers work? **Living cells and lasers are the only sources of coherent, monochromatic light of which I am aware.** I believe it is resonance - like influencing like - that accounts for much of the positive effects of low-level laser therapy. Perhaps because of this similarity, cells are able to accept and use the energy from a therapeutic laser as if it were their own.

There are no panaceas. Good medicine depends upon addressing the causes of imbalance ... yet laser therapy is an extraordinary modality, as close to a miracle as anything I have ever seen.

### **What is NAALT?**

NAALT is the North American Association of Laser Therapy. Its purpose, according to the NAALT Web site ([www.naalt.org](http://www.naalt.org)), is "To be a forum for laser therapy users in the North American regions (Mexico, USA and Canada). It is our intention to improve the

understanding of photobiological mechanisms, basic laser physics, treatment parameters, techniques, regulatory issues and reimbursement."

Anyone interested in using lasers in clinical practice should become involved in this association. There is a refreshing openness to new ideas and a sincere desire to improve medicine and science in NAALT. Although the idea of using this modality may be very new to most Oriental medicine practitioners, therapeutic lasers have a 35-year history and more than 2,500 studies and other documentation on which to draw. NAALT is a great resource for those seeking to learn from this experience.

In the past, NAALT was almost solely the province of researchers. Research into laser therapy and other phototherapeutics will continue to be extremely important, but NAALT is rapidly developing a clinical focus as well. Whereas there were less than a handful of clinicians in attendance at its conference two years ago, this year there were many clinicians, the majority of which were OM practitioners.

NAALT's third annual meeting was held April 4-6, 2003 in Bethesda, Md. For the first time, a full day of clinical demonstrations and workshops was scheduled, in addition to two days of outstanding research presentations. Credit for organizing the clinical day, and much more, goes to Margaret Naeser, PhD, LAc. Dr. Naeser helped to establish the first investigational review board for laser therapy in the U.S. in Boston in 1987, and has studied laser therapy extensively in well-received research for the treatment of paralysis in stroke, carpal tunnel syndrome and for other applications. She has worked tirelessly on behalf of Oriental medicine, and also to advance laser therapy. In addition to Dr. Naeser's presentation (and my own), it was gratifying to observe acupuncture physicians Steve Liu of Arizona and Brian Whidden of Massachusetts report their strategies on the treatment of neuropathy, and to see so many practitioners of Oriental medicine in attendance.

If you would like more information on the North American Association of Laser Therapy, please visit [www.naalt.org](http://www.naalt.org), or write to NAALT, 188 Sherwood Drive, Waynesboro, VA 22980.

### **Case Study: *Alopecia Areata***

Alopecia areata is a condition that causes hair loss in patches. MC is a 24-year-old, female high school teacher whose case study first appeared in the May issue of *Acupuncture Today*. She had lost approximately 25 percent of her hair before beginning laser therapy. At the time of the May article, MC had been seen two-to-three times weekly for approximately 25 visits, and hair regrowth was observed in two (of many) bald patches.

There are no bald patches anymore. Hair regrowth is coming in nicely everywhere, though in the two areas slowest to respond it has turned white. As of this writing, MC has been seen for 41 visits and is planning to continue treatment for another two weeks. She plans to remove the scarf she has been wearing to cover her head forever.

Laser therapy has been reported to stimulate hair regrowth successfully in women with *alopecia areata*, and in other conditions within two years of hair loss, if there are

viable hair follicles. Laser therapy will be ineffective for treating male pattern baldness or other conditions in which there are no living follicles.

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