Introduction to Electrolysis and Pearl Warner

Welcome to this episode of the PCOS SOS Summit. I'm your host, Dr. Felice Gersh. Here with me for this episode is a really wonderful woman who I met over a year ago when I spoke at her organization's annual meeting.

And her name is Pearl Warner She's the president of the American Electrology Association and Electrolysis is something every one of you listeners out there must learn about.

It is a fantastic option. So welcome, Pearl. Thank you so much for joining me, and I'd love for you to introduce yourself a little bit more to our audience and tell us about your journey and how you became involved in this really important therapeutic modality.

Well, thank you very much Dr. Gersh for inviting me. It is a pleasure to be here and to share the information for women who are affected with PCOS or excessive unwanted facial and or body hair.

I've been an electrologist for over 23 years now and how I became involved with electrolysis is that I had unwanted hair myself at one time and I didn't know what to do.

Nobody told me what to do and nobody knew what to do. But I happened to be looking at a Sunday newspaper, and there was a big spirit there that told me about unwanted facial hair and how to get rid of it.

The company is no longer in existence now, and I definitely I took up the idea in a hurry and that Monday morning they contacted them. And from there, my journey began, and this was approximately 1983.

I went through the process of getting hair removed from my face and underarms because I was affected with PCOS and nobody knew what to do or how to take care of it.

Nobody even knew about PCOS. That wasn't even a discussion at that time, and it was just that you had this dysphoria of unwanted facial hair. So from that point on, I went through and I finished my career in corporate America and I didn't know what I wanted to do, but I felt I was too young to retire.

So I looked around for other options and the idea of becoming like geologist.

Pearl's Personal PCOS and Hair Removal Journey

You help other women who were affected with this unwanted facial hair. So I did that. I went to school here in L. A. I happened to be located in Chicago, Illinois area.

And I went to school here at that time. And Illinois was not a licensed state. So that's the first thing you want to do, if at all possible. Get someone who is licensed and properly trained.

So from that point on, I decided to venture out and work with other women. I've worked with women from all walks of life over the period of time and explain and go through the process.

Now, that process is, first of all, you want to be you want to go through and have a consultation. You don't just jump into it. You sit down and you talk about it.

You talk about how long you've had this. I want it here, how it has affected your life, how changes that you've had in your body must be like drama. Just will do an in-depth consultation and explain the process and procedure to you.

And that process is, number one. We find out why and if at all possible. We have an association with a position. We will refer you to the position so that he can do the proper examinations and run the proper tests to determine possibly the concept behind one of you.

Now, one of the situations we've learned over time is that sometimes that unwanted hair is part of your DNA. And, of course, you know, our DNA is something we can't change, but we can kind of help control the situation so that you don't have such a dysphoria when you're dealing with it on day to day basis.

And from that point on, you would go to the electrolysis and she would determine she or he it could be a male electrolysis. They would determine which modality is best for you.

There are three modalities galvanic, which is direct, correct. Then there is thermal system. Molasses is an alternating current and it's heat. The heat is that a significant amount of heat?

You don't even feel it. It's moving so fast. And then there is the blend which is a combination of galvanic and they're molasses. And what you feel is a little bit of pressure from the galvanic and the heat from the thermal assist.

Normally you don't have any scarring or unwanted side effects. You might have a little bit of puffiness after the treatment is over with, but that is controlled with camphor receipts or an ice pack from your electrolysis.

Then on a following that you want to stay out of direct heat. That's the sunlight. Ensure that you use sunblock to protect the skin from the ultra violet rays from the sun and the heat.

And you don't want to pick or use makeup immediately after your treatment. That procedure is not 100% permanent at the time that you receive that first treatment.

It may take a series of treatments over a period of time, depending on the individual. That means that your situation is different from your best friends, your sisters, or your mothers.

It's not going to be the same outcome, and you're not going to have the same evaluation when you go in for your consultation. So those are some of the things that you want to remember, and it can take as long as 2 to 3 years or you can have unwanted hair over a period the rest of your life, which is one of the things that doctors are looking at now.

And they determine that there is it's part of a woman's life cycle. We go from infancy through childhood to puberty. Then we become pregnant and we go into menopause.

And all of these lifestyle changes causes a hormonal imbalance that can affect and cause the unwanted facial hair that many of us experience throughout our lives.

Thanks, Pearl. That is so much information. So I'm going to backtrack and go over some of the things that you told us. Number one, you yourself suffered from this excessive facial hair, what we call hirsutism.

And you mentioned about the emotional impact. I thought maybe you could share a little bit about how you felt as a woman with this problem, because honestly, this is not well appreciated.

It's really glossed over as to the emotional impact of this unwanted facial hair. So maybe a little bit. I mean, tell us about how you felt and then also your clients.

How Electrolysis Works and Treatment Basics

What did they express to you about the emotions of having this unwanted hair? Well, for me personally, the emotional side effects were very dramatic. I didn't know what to do.

We didn't have masks to wear back then. So what we did was we carried a pair of tweezers in our pocket or in our

purse. And the minute I get to a stop sign or stop, like, now, you know how much of a hurry we are always in?

In our day to day lifestyle. So, but I would pray that I would get stopped by the stop light long enough to tweeze those unwanted facial hairs out of my chin.

And over a period of time, not realizing the damage was done to my skin, I scarred myself. I had significant facial scars and then the complexion that I have, we hyper maintain with that complexion and this Patrick for four and a half to five.

So with that, that's Patrick. The pigmentation causes attacks, but my whole chin had become almost blue, black from bruising. And a friend of mine mentioned it to me.

And then I really became upset. And I started to wear a significant amount of makeup. I didn't even think to go to a dermatology just to talk about it.

Nobody ever said anything. Nobody never, ever said anything to me. None of my best friends, no one. And I'm pretty sure that most of you experienced the same thing.

Nobody, your best friend is going to say anything to you about it. This is something that we have to take up for ourselves, pay attention to our parents and decide to do something about it.

So for me, it was very traumatic, but I didn't know what to do. I would spend hours in the mirror trying to correct my problem, not realizing I was only making it worse.

I had had conversations with women while I'm sitting in my car, parking in the car, I would have the tendency to answer the phone because usually it's a potential client calling me.

And I've had women crying during the entire first few minutes that they began to talk to me and I receive that from girl. They start to tell me how devastated they are, what this has done to their lives, how it makes them feel.

And my heart goes out to them because I know exactly that. How that what that feeling is like. You look around and you look at other people and you wonder who's looking at you, who's noticed it.

And unfortunately, nobody is going to say anything. And I've assured them in most cases that I can do as much as we possibly can do with the help of their position.

Again, this is something you really have to take upon yourself and seek out a good physician, an endocrinologist would be a good doctor to look for. Or you can start with you guys if you feel more comfortable with that person and they can refer you to an endocrinologist and then technologist as a doctor who will test your hormones up, tested for hormonal imbalance and help you with getting you started on your journey at least.

So these are some of the things that I would recommend, and this is what I've seen with my clients coming in. Well, yes, the personal stories of unwanted hair are so enormously devastating like yours, and it's so under appreciated.

So thank you for sharing your own journey. Now there are many women who maybe think, Oh, I've heard of lasers. Okay, so maybe you could talk about the relative merits of your procedure versus laser.

Okay. With laser, laser has always been considered to be temporary hair removal. Laser hair removal burns the hair on the surface of the skin. It does not penetrate the surface of the skin and go down to the base of the hair root, which is what electrolysis does.

It burns it on the surface of the skin and the hair stays there. And it boils up sometimes within the next three days, we don't really know how quickly it leaves the surface of the skin, but we know it is.

It's there. When you leave the clinic with the electrolysis we insert for all the sides of the hair into the hair follicle,

we release a controlled amount of current.

That current goes to the patella, which is the growth area of the hair. And we release this current, whether it's galvanic or thermal, as we release the current and it starts to disable the hair at the root where it's going from.

Unfortunately, each one of these, the treatment itself, that first individual treatment does not permanently disable that hair over a period of time. The hair follicle is disabled.

Now, remember our bodies are healing mechanisms in themselves. So once the body starts to heal itself, it starts to figure out a way to control what is going on inside of it.

So your white blood cells rush to the area to start healing that, but at the same time you're fighting against your own system. So subsequently and over a period of time, you stimulated the hair growth below the surface of the skin.

With the tweezing, tweezing stimulates the hair follicle below the surface of the skin. So over ten, 15 years when you've been tweezing while that long time, then you've got this hair that's growing so below the surface of the skin we all have and no number of hair follicles that have not began to grow yet.

So this is why you're seeing hair from a later or after that treatment happening. There were five treatments maybe you're still seeing here is growing.

That's because you have dormant hair follicles below the surface of the skin that come alive and they start to grow. And what about, like you mentioned, that certain women, like women who have darker colored skin, may not be candidates for everything.

So maybe you could talk about could you mention like your Fitzpatrick score? So what about the color of skin? Is that an issue with electrolysis? And what about that as an issue with lasers?

Okay. With electrolysis. Electrolysis is effective and works on us and it doesn't matter whether you have just Patrick one or six. Anybody can use electrolysis, unfortunately, with laser hair removal.

Everybody is not a prime candidate for laser hair removal. We talk about the skin tell with Fitzpatrick one through three. They're prime candidates for laser hair removal.

However, once the hair turns white or gray, laser is no longer effective on those white or gray hairs because the laser beam has to have a contrast, which is the reason why it doesn't work.

And with those having that in mind, you want to ensure that you go to someone who is going to be upfront with you and let you know, because sometimes laser can work in tandem with the electrolysis.

If you have an excessive amount of air and you're a prime candidate, meaning your skin tone is good and the color of the hair's a good surface. Is that your Fitzpatrick 1 to 2 and you have brunet hair.

You'll be a good candidate. But if you have this patchy one, two or three and you are red hair, you may run into a little bit of a problem because you don't have the contrast there that is needed for the laser beam, which is why of this, Patrick, for five and six may not be good candidates because there's not enough contrast between the dark hair and the skin tone.

Emotional Impact of Unwanted Hair

Now, I've always thought, and it's so correct me, is that when you have a huge area like, say, the legs that dab and you have the proper skin contrast with the hair color, you know, lighter skin and darker hair that may be doing the legs with laser hair reduction seems like a reasonable thing because electrolysis for the entire leg would be a challenge.

But when you're dealing with the face or around the neck, the chin, that electrolysis is like such a wonderful option because it is considered permanent.

Although, like you said, new hairs can come. You know it's permanent for the ones that are actually treated, you know, the way that they have to be treated often, like you said multiple times to really make that follicle, give up the ghost and stop, you know, having that hair regrow.

But for for the area, like involving the chin or the sideburns that under the under the chin and the mustache and also the neck, that electrolysis. This is really a fantastic option.

So how do you think about blending it in that way? Absolutely. That is a perfect option. If you've got leg hair, because for some of us, that leg hair can be a nuisance.

Laser is the better option. You can get the legs laser without any concern at all and then you would blend the two. Is that mentioned? Blend the two and do electrolysis on your face in that glittery area between the breasts if needed.

And that's great. But for the legs, I would also recommend anyone that even for males with that hair, sometimes some of the men look like bears. Laser is a better option, a much better option for them.

And the beginning. Now, if after all of that hair is removed and put to rest, if you will, then you can start doing your electrolysis treatment for permanent hair removal on those areas after you've gotten rid of the bulk of the hair and is thinned out.

And yet it's not such a nuisance to you. That's great. And what about other methods, like you mentioned, that if you use tweezers and you pluck the hair, you're actually stimulating hair growth?

I've heard similar concerning shaving and I know that shaving has been around a long time. So maybe you could comment on these alternative things that women who are desperate, they just do whatever they can come up with.

Like, you know, obviously a razor blade is usually readily available. What about the option of shaving? Obviously, the hair grows back really fast, but it does it even grow back in greater quantities.

Okay. There's been a lot of conversation about that. Does shaving stimulate the hair growth? I don't me personally, I don't think shaving actually stimulates the hair growth.

What shaving does and gives it a blunt to edge on the hair. And it seems like that hair is thicker or you are getting more hair. But the other problem is with shaving, hairs grow in five different directions.

If you would take a coin the size of a nickel, a hair coming from point, any place around that nickel, it has some. Here's the point up down one on either side of that nickel, if you will.

It can be going to the right. To the left. Well, you know, your razor is a lot wider than that nickel. So you're going to be shaving hairs against their growth.

And if you do that, you can ask to oftentimes cut that hair off and cause an ingrown hair. That is one of the biggest problems with shaving is causing an ingrown hair.

Then the other problem is most people think that they can shape the hair below the surface of the skin to get a smooth face. Well, you can't strip the hair below the surface of the skin.

And oftentimes you find yourself damaging your skin even more with your corrective measures method, even though you don't realize it at the time and maybe one or two times doing that, it won't show any damage on your skin.

But if you continue to do that, and most people, from my conversations with them, they shape every single day women as well as men, because they want that smooth finish on their skin.

So they will shave every single day. And this is what I tell my clients when I first begin with them. Nobody can see those real short hairs that are on your face that you see and feel.

Anyone that gets closer than 18 inches to your face, they can't see anything because your vision acuity is lost when you get that close to a person's face.

And besides, trust me, they're not looking at hairs or care about hairs. If they get that close to your face.

Electrolysis vs. Laser Hair Removal

And another technique I've heard of is threading where now if you're threading, you're actually pulling hair is out. Would that be correct in that might not be any real difference.

And then doing a tweezer treatment. Absolutely. Threading is very similar to tweezing. All difference is with threading. You're getting numerous hairs out, you're getting more than one hair out at a time.

You're just ripping the hairs out of the tissue. Same effect as tweezing, if not worse, because I kind of watched the threads in the shopping malls and they're going over their face really quick and they're ripping it out.

So if you're tweezing and you're pleasing gently in your bathroom mirror, can you imagine the damage that that threading process is doing to your tissue and the hair follicle itself?

It's really snatching that hair up out of the tissue. It's causing a big response from your system. It causes a response from your system. It's like you pull a plant up out of the garden.

If you go and pull a lead out is we don't pull our plants, we usually pull the weeds out. And you notice sometimes when you pull the weeds out, it has a lot of roots on it.

And when you pull it up, you tear up a lot of the ground around that. We sort of the same thing. That's happening on the inside of your skin when the lotus surfaces, the skin when you're threading.

Well, I just love that analogy. All that's like I can I'm just picturing the weeds and all the the lovely soil coming up with it and the whole ground just looking like it's exploded in little bits so that I think, really resonated with people.

Now, if we go back to the process now, you mentioned like a wire going into the hair follicle, maybe talk a little bit more about how the process occurs.

What do people feel? How long does it take, that type of thing? Okay, with The Wire? It's a very fine wire and they're sterile. Number one. They're one time use.

That's one thing you want to keep in mind. All of the probes, we call them probes. All of the probes, a one time use that wasn't, you know, 50, 60 years ago, they had some different things going on.

But today, they're one time use. As I said, they come prepackaged from the manufacturer in a sterile condition and most electric allergies do not open that package up until the client is in position to be treated.

So that way it stays sterile. The probes come in various sizes from a one to a seven, and you would use the probe that is most appropriate for the hair itself most of the time for facial hair around the lips eye, your upper lip, their chance for women.

They would be using anywhere from three to a five. But the five is barbaric, coarse hair. I use mostly threes and worse because that's about as thick as the hair gets.

And you go in the hair follicle, you're not making a new entry in the tissue, you're going into the hair follicle or long sustained ear. That's the reason why the probe has to be the same size as the hair itself and you release the controlled amount of current.

Now probes come in different materials. Some of them are gold, some of them are stainless steel. The stainless steel has nickel in it, so that's a question you want to ask your client when you're interviewing or you want to keep in mind as to whether or not the patient is allergic to nickel.

And how do you know if you're allergic to nickel, if you've never been to the doctor and had someone to tell you that you have an allergic response to a nickel is because of you wear earrings, inexpensive earrings, and your ear turns blue.

A black. Then you have an allergic reaction to nickel. That's one of the easiest and quickest ways to tell. So that's something you want to make sure that you find out and to avoid that situation, because most people don't know whether or not they're allergic to nickel.

I use gold probes. That's the other material that the pill comes in. They come in gold and mostly everybody is. I haven't met anybody that was allergic to go yet.

So gold has been my way out to get around that situation.

Shaving, Threading, and Other Hair Removal Methods

But again, you know, that's something that's a choice that the electrolysis can make as to whether matte the nickel or gold is most appropriate for their practice.

And many of us will carry both prototypes in our office for various reasons. Well, I have never met anyone allergic to gold either, so. And. And what about the sensations that are generated by the treatment?

Does it feel like a hit? Do you feel a buzz or do you have to have numbing or, you know, do you need to have like preparation emotionally because it's going to be a little uncomfortable or what what would it feel like?

Okay. When you get the treatment? I've heard different responses from different people. So for some people, they say that they feel a little bit of heat.

For some, they say they feel a little bit of pressure. Does it hurt? I say the sensation is more like an individual basis as to whether it hurts or not, because we all have a different level of pain tolerance. So.

But as far as it being painful, no, it is not painful. It's definitely not painful. I've have clients that lay down and go to sleep while I'm working.

I don't talk to them, they don't talk to me and I just work and they sleep. They look forward to that time to rest and relax. Now, on the other hand, there could be someone else who is very sensitive and we can put a topical on them when they get to the office.

And most of the times those topicals will take 10 to 15 minutes of maybe not a half hour to be effective. And there are different schools of thought as to whether or not to put a topical on the person or not to put the topical on the person in your office.

Some clients years ago, I don't see it happening too much now, and when I first began to practice, I would pull up in front of my office and there would be a lady sitting in front of my office with Saran Wrap wrapped around her chin and she's reading the newspaper.

Well, this is called a Clooney and they clip the tissue so that the heat can cause the topical ingredient to penetrate the tissue and numb the nerves.

That has been done and it's done quite often even today. Clients will be now before they have a treatment and rarely numb my clients because we're able to adjust the strength of the current that we're using.

So I try to use something that's mild and comfortable and I tell people all the time, if I was causing pain and you were lying there in tears, I wouldn't be able to work on you.

I wouldn't be able to do it because it would have that same in most people attack, not me. I'm not in it to hurt someone or to make them feel uncomfortable.

So I go out of my way to make sure that my clients are comfortable with the treatment and doing the treatment. I one of my most recent experience and I'm very pleased with the outcome.

So, young lady, she just graduated from grammar school. This is her first semester in high school. She has hair and a neck. Let's say she's got facial hair all around her.

Some sideburns are chin, neck. And when she came, she was petrified. She was I was in tears when she laid on my table the first time. And we have a lot in common.

We started to talk about school. We talked about religion. We happened to be the same faith base we talked about. I found ways to talk to her and make her comfortable.

And that means a lot to the client when you make them feel that way. And from that point, she I haven't had a tear yet from her. And the only problem I have with this young lady is if she gets out of school early, she hits straight to my office and she can bind up being there 15 minutes to a half hour early.

And I had the class and her two kids come early like that because I try to put 15 minutes between clients so that I can, you know, get the other person out.

You can clean up between the clients and I'll assume you can't come 15 minutes early like that. You can give me a call and let me know that you're running and you can probably get here early.

That would be fine. And then I can let you know. Okay, come on.

What to Expect During Electrolysis Treatment

But if you know that if I'm still working on somebody and then you might want to stop and get you a treat or something, or just sit back and relax until your time is available.

So that's one of the things I always think about with my clients. So as far as being uncomfortable, electrolysis does not hurt, okay? It's not like making a visit to the dentist.

It's not like and going to the dentist today doesn't hurt anymore because they've figured out ways to spray your gum to make sure that you don't feel the insertion of the stronger deadening process.

So we have found ways to make electrolysis as comfortable to the most sensitive person. Well, I think that is so reassuring. The idea that you have like around a 14 year old who can't wait to arrive, you know, the eagerness is just really indicative of what this process means to someone to actually have that hair taken care of.

Now, I know with lasers, they often say, you know, you should shave like prepare the hair ahead of time. Do you need to do anything ahead of time for electrolysis like not shave or shave or does it matter?

Or What would you say is the prep for going through this procedure or electrolysis? All we really want you to do is cleanse your skin very good before you leave home if possible.

Most of us wear makeup and some women with excessive hair, they wear excessive amounts of makeup because

they think their makeup is going to hyper here.

So the most important thing is to cleanse your skin. And if we ask you also not to cut, that is the procedure that you would use the method to minimize the amount of facial hair that is to the naked eye.

You would take a small pair of cuticle scissors with around that rounded tip gives you a little bit more comfort and ensuring that you're not going to stick yourself with the hand that does scissors.

So you want to clip the hairs as close as you possibly can in between treatments, but 2 to 3 days before your treatment leave the hairs be because we need the hairs to be above the surface of the skin so that we can grasp with the tweezers.

We don't want to scratch your skin with the tweezers trying to get the hair from out of the skin with the tweezers tip. So we ask you, cleanse the skin, drink lots of water, stay hydrated.

The more hydrated you are, the more comfortable your treatment will be. Minimize the amount of coffee that you drink, because caffeine sometimes has the tendency to stimulate the nerve endings.

So you want to minimize the coffee, your two or three cup of coffee a day person try to have maybe only one cup of coffee before you treatment and then after the treatment, of course, you can have as many cups as why, but then with water, drink as much water as you possibly can.

Now, a lot of women with PCOS, yes, many have really bad acne. And it's often on the the jawline and the areas where the hair is growing. Is that a contraindication or can you work around acne or how would that interfere, if at all, with your procedure?

Okay. With an individual with acne, if the acne is still, I will not put an insertion. And if the hair is coming out of that pustule, I will not go into that personal to pull the hair out with my pro.

I will work around it if possible, but for the most part to ensure that the person does not have any contraindication with the acne. We try to make sure that the acne is calmed down before we work on an individual with acne.

That sounds like a really very important point. Now everyone out there I can guarantee wants to be your client because you are fantastic. You have an organization and that you head on.

Is that a good way for people to try to find someone if they're not in Chicago? And so if they are like, how can they find you and how can they find someone like you who is well-trained and caring, who can do this electrolysis process for them?

Okay. The American Electrology Association has over 900 members throughout the United States. Canada. You go online to the American Electrology website, americanelectrology.com you go to find in electrolysis and it will ask you how far are you willing to travel?

Five miles, ten miles, 15 miles, or depending on if you live in a rural area, if you're, you know, willing to travel a little bit further, but you can find an electrolysis near me, near me, meaning you click on it, sync your towel with there throughout the United States, electrolysis throughout the United States.

So you want to find someone that's listed in our roster and they're on the website Baystate and it will tell you what type of treatment they offer if they do all three modalities.

The plan, galvanic or the Miles's, it will challenge you right on the website by their name. It'll tell you if they're certified professional electrolysis.

Finding a Qualified Electrologist

What you will see is a CPE behind their name. CPE means that that person has gone above and beyond the requirements of their state requirements. As an electrolysis, as a CPE, they're required to have 15 continuing education hours every year, the five year period of time and they are recertify.

And for some states you're only required to do 30 hours over a two year period of time or maybe 10 hours over a two year period of time. Some states aren't licensed at all, so you want to make sure you find someone, if possible, in a licensed state.

If you are in an unlicensed state, try to hook up with a sleepy that person has gone above and beyond the call of duty as far as training, and they're staying on top of their goal because they have to continue an education.

HOURS Well, I know that you have those letters after your name, so that's what you look for, right? And I know your organization has an annual conference, right, where you do a lot of continuing medical education hours.

So I mean, and I was very impressed with the members that I met at your conference a year or so ago. So everyone should look for the quality, trained individual, just like you described.

I can't thank you enough, Pearl. This is such important information. And unfortunately, I'm sure you are aware of this. Many medical doctors just don't even know about this.

You know, this is not included in medical training. And so sometimes this is where people have to just take charge for themselves and say, you know, I want to get treated just like you did.

Nobody told you you had to go and do your own work in an investigation. And that's why I'm so, so that you were able to join us so that everyone out there and I would say 99.9% of everyone watching this needs and would benefit from this service.

So thank you so much. And I look forward to staying connected and connecting my patients to other providers as close to you as I can find, because this is really such a life changing process to eliminate that unwanted hair, which is so emotionally devastating.

So thanks again so much. Thank you again, Dr. Gersh, for having me. It's my pleasure. And I wish you all the best in your endeavor as we try to educate as many people as we possibly can.

Thank you.