



GONE TODAY, HAIR TOMORROW

If your scalp has more in common with Homer Simpson than with Samson, it's encouraging to know that hair restoration technology has come a long way since the days of obvious plugs.

Irish clinic Hair Restoration Blackrock (HRBR) has been working to further improve the technology behind the process, including developing ways of better protecting the tiny grafts before they are replanted back into a different area of the scalp.

The Dublin clinic was set up in 2003, explains co-founder Dr Maurice Collins, who had been working as a head and neck surgeon and looked into hair transplants when a friend asked for a recommendation: "The specialty was down in the gutter and nobody was doing it properly so I saw an opportunity and trained up in it."

Older techniques had involved drilling hair-bearing skin out of the back of the head then drilling a hole in the bare area at the front where the patch could be replanted, he says. But today surgeons can take a finer route to redistributing the crowning glory: by moving individual follicles or units - each of which bears an average of two hairs.


"The principle of what we do is incredibly simple - we take the roses out of the back garden and we replant them in the front garden," he says. "But the technology comes in how you handle them." The process can involve thousands of grafts being moved - and the time they spend outside the body as they wait to go to their new home is critical for their survival and function, according to Dr Collins.

"When we take the hair and the root out, it has to be protected while it is outside the body," he says. "We have developed holding solutions, so the grafts are maintained viable, and our success rate now is that 98 per cent of the grafts that we transplant grow viable hair."

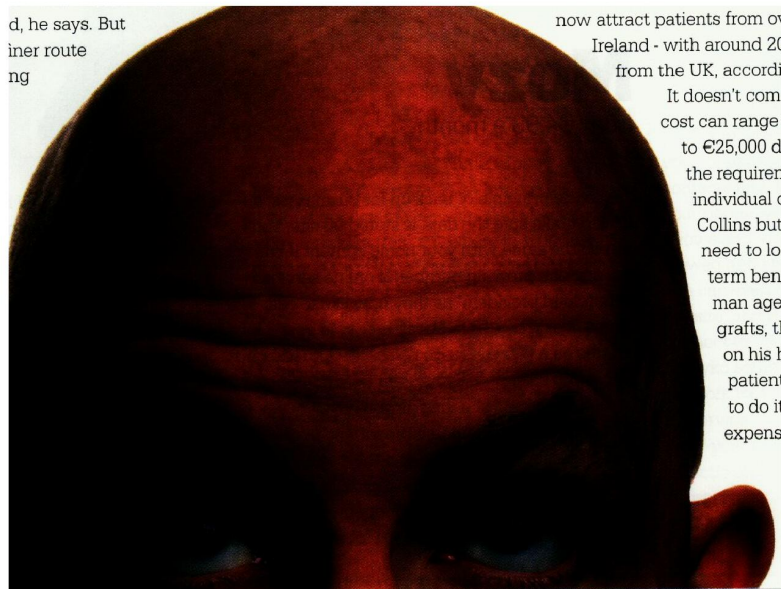
Getting the logistics right is also key, he

adds. "I did 4,000 grafts the other day and it took 11 hours to do the whole operation, so we have devised strategies and in-theatre management so that the organs are outside the body for a minimal amount of time."

The clinic develops its own scalpels, which Dr Collins describes as "smaller than a pinprick" and is continuing to refine the holding solutions. They now attract patients from overseas as well as Ireland - with around 20 per cent coming from the UK, according to Dr Collins.

It doesn't come cheap - the cost can range from €3,000 to €25,000 depending on the requirements of the individual case, but Dr Collins but he argues the need to look at the long-term benefit. "If a young man aged 30 gets 4000 grafts, that is 8000 hairs on his head. I tell the patients: it costs a lot to do it, but it is not expensive." 

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*An Irish clinic has improved the science of hair replacement and is now attracting customers from overseas. **Claire O'Connell** reports.*