

Tattoo remorse? New technique offers quick removal

By Brian Alexander

Good news for all those people who look in the mirror and confront that tattoo they purchased with the wisdom of tequila, or lover's passion, or peer pressure, but now regret.

A new technique may drastically cut the time required to remove it, reducing what could take a year or more to just several months.

Known among dermatological laser surgeons as "R20," the protocol involves a series of passes over the inked area, twenty minutes apart, during one office visit rather than making one pass per office visit. That way, more ink is lifted and disintegrated per visit.

Gina Gianni, 29, a Los Angeles model and "background" actress who has appeared on shows like "Entourage," makes her living with her looks, but she often had to cover up tattoos when she auditioned, including one that says "Nostrum diligo."

She thought the phrase was Latin for "our love," and though it's slightly off (diligo is more like "prize" or "esteem"), she still "did not like looking at it because it reminds me of an ex-boyfriend," she said in an interview.

Gianni thought of having it erased but an earlier attempt to remove an ankle tattoo hurt so badly she gave up after one session.

Are tattoos a parenting "do" or "don't"?

Then, in February, a team headed by Greek doctors published results of the new R20 protocol in the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*. Though four passes, spaced twenty minutes apart, caused more upfront injury to the skin than the conventional method, it created no more scarring or adverse effects, and it removed much more ink than a single pass. Dr. Keyvan Nouri, professor of dermatologic surgery at the University of Miami's Miller School of Medicine, corroborated those findings when his staff tested it on patients.

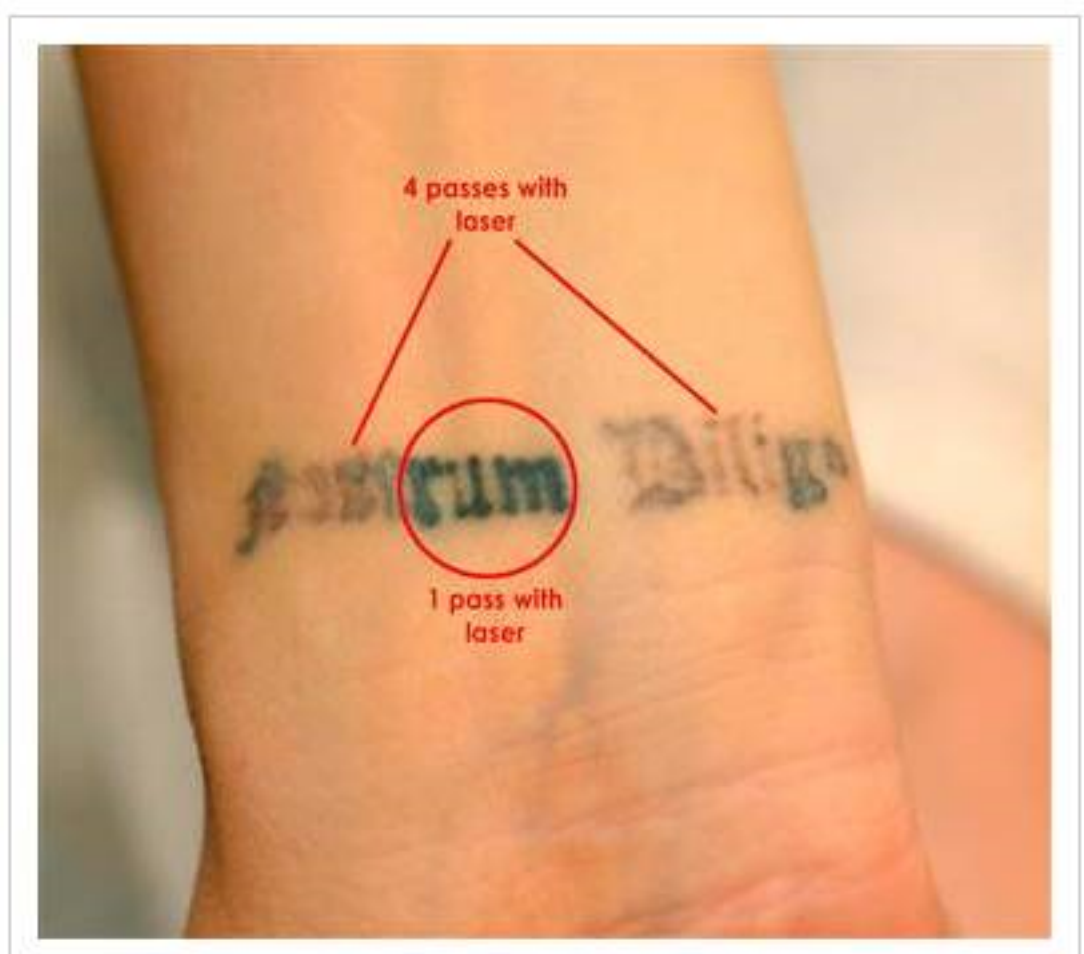
Despite some drawbacks like much longer office visits and higher cost, Nouri said the process "could become the standard of care," though he cautioned that it's too soon to say for sure.

Dr. Mitchell Chasin, director of The Reflections Center for Skin and Body in Livingston, N.J., swears by the new technique. "It is not only a way to decrease the number of treatments but to improve the appearance of skin after removal," he explained. But he warns potential patients that success relies heavily on expertise and equipment.

"We always tell consumers that doctors should have specific laser wavelengths for the tattoos," he said. "For example, I might use three different lasers to remove green, black and red and that goes for any kind of tattoo removal."

When Gianni came to him during a lengthy vacation to New Jersey, saying "I want this gone as quickly as possible!" he tried the R20 technique.

"We did it February 8 and in the areas we hit three or four times, it is 75 percent gone," she reported. "In the areas we hit only once, it doesn't look like it was hit at all."



Reflections Center for Skin & Body

Gina Gianni, a model, regretted having a Latin phrase tattooed on her wrist and is undergoing a new technique that fades the tattoo more quickly than traditional methods.