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New tech focuses on scarring

Plainfield company on the cutting edge of blemish-free healing

By Bob Okon
STAFF WRITER

PLAINFIELD — A Plainfield company is creating new ways to treat scars.

Avocet Polymer Technologies Inc. has developed two products designed to reduce scar formation from injuring ranging from critical burns to minor cuts.

As common to human experience as scars may be, treating them is a relatively new venture for medicine, said Dr. Raphael Lee, Avocet's founder.

"Up until 10 or 15 years ago, the focus of medicine had been on strategies to get wounds to heal," Lee said. "It's only recently that the focus has been on controlling the outcome — how the scar will heal."

What patients really want now, Lee said, "is a less disfiguring outcome."

Drugstore shelves

The number of anti-scar products on drugstore shelves today is a reflection of the growing interest in scar treatment, Lee said.

"Five years ago you saw nothing," he said.

Avocet makes two major products: Avosil, an ointment; and Avogel, a hydrogel sheeting consisting of 60 percent water that can be applied to a scar like a bandage.

The products have been used primarily in hospitals, particularly burn centers, which is a reflection of Lee's background.

He's a professor of surgery at the University of Chicago and formerly was director of the university hospital's burn center.

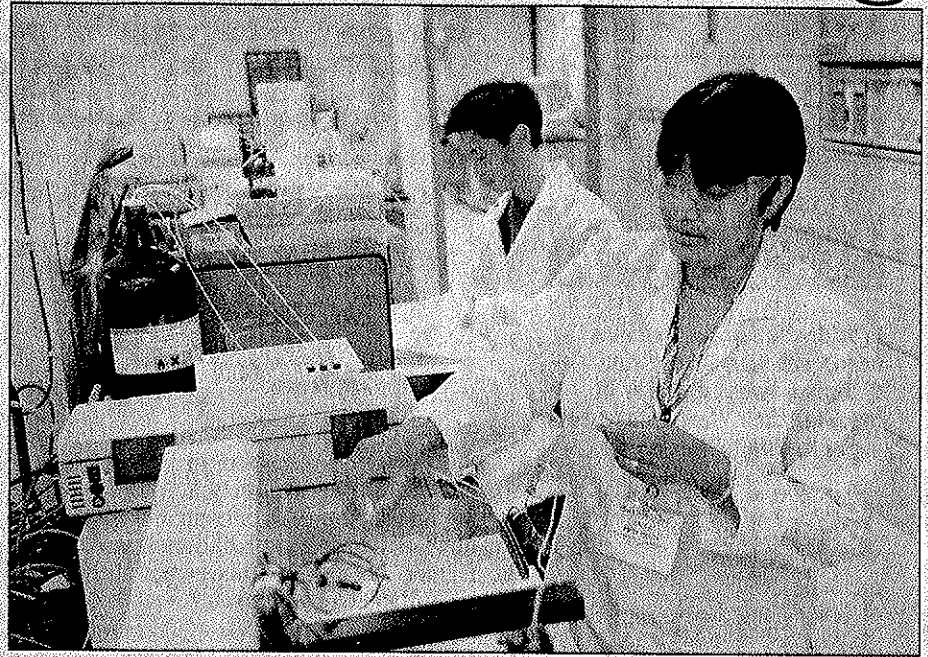
But Lee said Avocet is exploring retail sales of Avosil and Avogel.

"They are very useful in treatment of cuts and burns — things experienced in everyday living," he said.

The products aren't on drugstore shelves, although the company has begun an effort to reach that market. Avogel and Avosil can be ordered at Walgreens and CVS stores. And, Avocet made both products available this month on Amazon.com.

First appeared in 2003

The company is a small one with six employees. It has offices and a laboratory for



PHOTOS BY LIZ WILKINSON ALLEN/
STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Anita Mehta (above, front), interim chief operating officer and vice president for research and development, and Waiken Wong, a senior research scientist, work Wednesday in the lab at Avocet Polymer Technologies Inc. in Plainfield. Scientists at Avocet have developed Avosil and Avogel (right), new products for treating scarring.

Main St.

Avocet products are very new.

Avogel was approved for use by the Federal Drug Administration in 2000 and first appeared on the market in 2003. Avosil came out the following year.

Both products have been improved since then, said Anita Mehta, Avocet's interim chief operating officer and vice president for research and development.

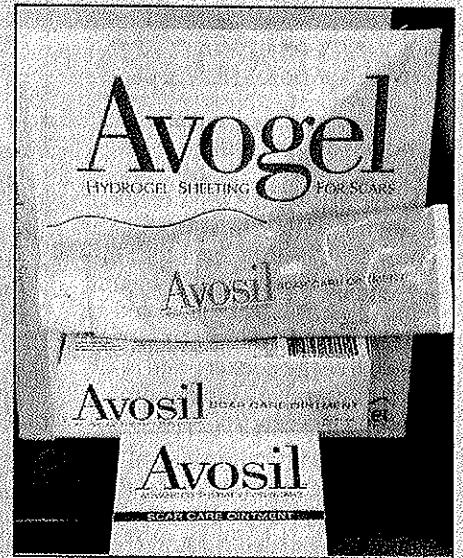
"We are heavily into research," Mehta said. "Development is our focus."

She was instrumental in the development of a new form of Avogel, which will adhere to the skin better than the original. The new Avogel will be introduced by January, Mehta said, and the company has high hopes in its potential.

"It will be a market leader," Mehta said. "That is what we are expecting. We have spent two years on the research."

Hydrogel licenses

Avocet has licenses on the use of hydro-



officials believe will help them develop business because of the substance's value in inhibiting scar formation.

Avosil and Avogel are designed to be used immediately after a wound is healed, Lee said.

"They are useful early and are much more effective in prevention," he said.

Healing scars after they've formed is much more difficult, he said. But Avocet is working on that, too.

Bob Okon can be reached at (815)