

Fast laser offers easier farewell to the ink

» TIM BARLASS

Did you hear the one about the R&B singer who decided she'd have the name of her partner tattooed on a very, well, intimate place? They split up.

It's true, and recounted by Miami tattoo removal expert Jeremy Green (actually he's one of America's most eminent dermatologists), who had the task of trying to remove it.

As evidenced by various celebs, tattoo removal isn't always as successful as its owner may like it to be.

A case in point is Johnny Depp, who, after breaking up with Winona Ryder, changed "Winona Forever" to "Wino Forever". Angelina Jolie smudged out – almost – Billy Bob and a serpent, replacing them with the geographical co-ordinates of the locations where her children first entered her life. Melanie Griffith zapped Antonio Banderas but not the heart surrounding his name.

But now there is hope in the shape of a new laser machine that makes the process of removal a little more efficient, a little less painful but possibly not a little less expensive.

Angel Passanti agreed to be a guinea pig at a recent conference at the Australasian College of Dermatologists in Adelaide. She is having two of her six tattoos removed using the new Elighten machine made in the US.

At the age of 19 she was given a voucher by a girlfriend to have a tattoo of her choosing.

"At the time I thought it was the best present," she said. "Now I think it was the worst."

The problem is that she is a nurse in the emergency department of a Sydney hospital. The patients don't like it. She has a lock and chain on one wrist and a key on the other. The other four tattoos are more readily covered by clothing.

"Five years later, as I get ready to settle down, I don't want them any more," she said. "It isn't the way I want to portray myself. People judge me solely on my tattoos. They make opinions before I have done anything and think I don't know what I am doing or am uneducated."

Dr Green demonstrated to the conference the new machine called a picosecond pulse laser. In layman's terms, what it does is zap the tattoo ink at a higher wavelength than previous, slower machines. It's a bit like comparing a jet engine with a propeller.

The result: less burning sensation or pain for the patient, more efficient



Angel Passanti put her hand up to be a guinea pig for laser treatment to have her tattoos removed. The machine's operator, Dr Jeremy Green, says he could do wonders with Angelina Jolie's old tats. Johnny Depp merely rubbed out his ex-love.

Main photo: Peter Rae

ink removal and fewer visits to be zapped – maybe five instead of 15. The process can take a while because the treated area has to scab over and heal before the next zap attack.

"I am confident Angel will be able to clear those tattoos," Dr Green said. Of Jolie's tattoo, he said: "You can

still see the faded remnants of Billy Bob. If she came into my clinic, we could get rid of Billy Bob forever."

Of Griffith, he said: "I think she would look prettier if she had the whole thing removed. She left the heart but you can still see Antonio. We could finish the job."

Depp had a pretty good job done, he said. "Most of these sort of people can go to the best there is, but they still haven't had complete success," he said.

And what happened to the R&B singer?

"It's easier to remove tattoos near-

er to the centre of the body," he said. "Wrist and ankles being further away are, for some reason, trickier."

"As I recall, the tattoo was in just black ink, which makes things simpler. And, of course, women are much more tolerant when it comes to enduring pain."