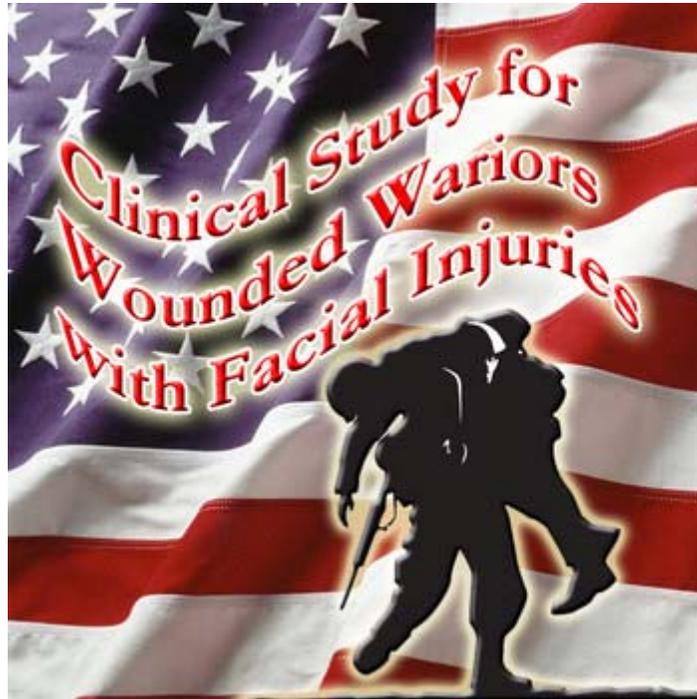


UCLA seeking Wounded Warriors with severe facial injuries for clinical trial



The current estimate of veterans who have lost all or part of their face is approximately 200

By: Robin Wulffson, M.D.

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For many Angelenos, [Memorial Day](#) is regarded a day off from work to enjoy family activities or other pleasurable pastimes. Many forget that the purpose of the federal holiday is to honor the men and women who lost their lives serving our nation. In my opinion, the day should be set aside not only to honor those who died in combat but also to pay homage to all who served. Some of our service men and women have survived their combat experience return with injuries ranging from minor to horrific. For example, the current estimate of veterans who have lost all or part of their face is approximately 200. These Wounded Warriors have incurred a degree of facial injury that is not repairable by conventional reconstructive surgery, which uses the patient's own tissue to restore facial features and function. When extensive damage is present, a [face transplant](#) using donor tissues is the best option. On May 24, UCLA Health System announced that they were launching the first face transplant program in the western United States. Together with the announcement, they noted that they were seeking patients willing to participate in a face-transplant [clinical trial](#). The new program offers fresh hope for individuals who have severe facial disfigurement from burns or trauma.

To date, only 19 patients worldwide have received partial or complete facial transplants; five of these surgeries have been performed in the US. Individuals with these injuries not only suffer from disfigurement but also have difficulty eating,

speaking, and breathing. A simple function such as sipping on a glass of water is impossible. “Facial transplantation offers the potential to restore humanity to persons who have suffered the devastating loss of their face,” noted Dr. Kodi Azari, chief of reconstructive transplantation and associate professor of surgery at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. He explained that early surgeries have achieved promising results in improving both appearance and function.

In addition to seeking a donor with a good tissue match, it is necessary to obtain one of the same sex with similar facial features and complexion. The final result is a blend between the donor face and the recipient's face prior to injury. Following the surgery, the patient, as in other transplant procedures, must take immunosuppressive medication to prevent rejection. Another postoperative issue unique to face transplantation is the patient's self-image. The UCLA surgeons are aware that one's face is one's identity; therefore, the patients receive emotional support from UCLA professionals to help them adjust to their new face. The program co-director, Dr. Reza Jarrahy, explained that the transplant team's goal is to return a sense of normalcy to the patients' lives—a normal life that is not hampered by facial appearance.

To qualify for the clinical trial, the candidates must be evaluated as to whether they meet the criteria for participation. The evaluation includes a comprehensive medical history, a physical examination, lab tests, X-rays, and a psychological exam. In addition, the patients must meet the following criteria:

- The facial disfigurement cannot be repaired by conventional surgery.
- The disfigurement is not due to a birth defect.
- The patient's age is between 18 and 60 years.
- The patient has no serious infections, including HIV or hepatitis B or C.
- The patient is in otherwise good general health.
- The patient must commit to extensive rehabilitation after surgery, including soft-tissue massage and speech, swallowing and facial-movement therapies.
- The patient must agree to follow a drug schedule to prevent transplant rejection and attend all appointments at the transplant center.

Patients who meet the criteria will be placed on a waiting list until a suitable donor is located. A number of criteria are involved in the matching process, including blood type, gender, ethnicity, skin tone, hair pattern and other criteria. The surgery takes from eight to 20 hours to complete. First, the damaged tissue is removed; then, the donor tissue is attached. The procedure includes joining soft tissue such as skin, fat, muscles, tendons, and ligaments. Bone tissue is joined via screws and other hardware. An essential—and most delicate—part of the procedure is connecting the donor nerves and blood vessels to those of the recipient. This is accomplished via microsurgical techniques.

For more information on the clinical trial, or to learn more about face transplantation at UCLA, click on [this link](#) or call: (310) 794-2558. To view a video of the face transplant procedure, click on [this link](#).