

Purely Beneficial

by THEODORA MALISON photography by JEFF ANDERSON

Victoria Bliss-Calkins and the physicians at **Oxygen Oasis Hyperbaric Wellness Center** harness nature's purest element to help patients heal.



Imagine beating stage IV cancer only to be left with debilitating injuries from radiation therapy, surviving a near-fatal car crash with life altering effects of a traumatic brain injury (TBI), or suffering from PTSD-induced insomnia and panic attacks after returning home from the battlefield.

What if all of the above could be remedied through a natural, holistic solution, without a cocktail of potentially damaging and addictive prescription drugs? Such a solution already exists, according to Victoria Bliss, CEO of Oxygen Oasis Hyperbaric Wellness Center in Langhorne, PA. Bliss has seen patients recover from all of the scenarios listed above, with the help of nature's purest ingredient: oxygen.

Specifically, Bliss is talking about hyperbaric oxygen therapy (HBOT). Bliss first discovered the true healing impact of HBOT when her husband suffered radiation injuries after treating for stage IV cancer.

HBOT is a noninvasive therapy that works by delivering 100 percent oxygen at pressures greater than two to three times the normal atmospheric pressure to a patient in a chamber. HBOT enhances the body's ability to heal by increasing oxygen concentration in the body to 15 to 20 times greater than normal at the cellular level.

The successful results of her husband's HBOT treatments inspired Bliss to open Oxygen Oasis Hyperbaric Wellness Center, a Joint Commission-accredited facility offering treatment in both multiplace and monoplace hyperbaric chambers. Treatments range from

a minimum of 40 sessions to as many 120 sessions, depending on the severity of a patient's condition.

"The standard protocol is an initial 40 treatments," adds Jason Friel, director of safety and operations at Oxygen Oasis. "Traditionally, no matter where you go in the world, HBOT is prescribed in blocks of 40 treatments. Treatments start at five days per week for the first two to three weeks of treatment, and then patients can reduce their treatments to three days per week."

Multiple Benefits

Bliss and Friel say hyperbaric oxygen therapy produces numerous benefits, such as staving off infection and stimulating the growth of new blood vessels to improve blood flow to compromised tissue and bone. HBOT is safe for patients of all ages and doesn't

cause any discernible side effects, unlike the prescription drugs often used to treat most illnesses and injuries.

The therapy is often used to address the so-called “spiral effect”—a progression of worsening symptoms that can lead to further injury—in patients who suffer from traumatic brain injury, concussions or even PTSD. Bliss says this effect is commonly seen in military veterans and pro athletes who have suffered numerous concussions and head trauma, causing irritability, sleeplessness, loss of memory, and a building anger.

Survivors of war can be especially hard hit by the spiral effect. Bliss estimates more than 800,000 veterans who have returned home from recent military conflicts have experienced some kind of brain injury, which is often treated with medication. Furthermore, she says as many as 22 military veterans commit suicide each day, though she suggests accidental prescription-drug overdoses may push the number to as high as 40 suicides per day.

“Veterans are prescribed up to 16 different drugs—for sleeping, waking up, memory, pain, depression and more,” Bliss says. “It ends up becoming one major cocktail of drugs that only mask symptoms, it doesn’t cure them. If you drink a glass of scotch and mix it with these drugs, overdose and death are an unfortunate possibility.”

Difficulty sleeping tends to be the most significant challenge for those coping with PTSD, according to Friel. He says the first five oxygen treatments alone can help patients rest “and make them feel more relaxed and less stressed.”

Improving Quality of Life

Bliss references a U.S. Marine Corps veteran—“Sergeant Nick”—as an example of the therapy’s success in treating TBI. After numerous concussions resulting from his convoy getting hit by an improvised explosive device while deployed in the Middle East, Sergeant Nick suffered severe traumatic brain injury; the only memory he has is of being dragged out of the fire. After the incident, he experienced a rapid decline in his quality of life—insomnia, memory loss, anxiety and debilitating migraines. Sergeant Nick stated his migraines came to a halt after one HBOT treatment.

“Sergeant Nick’s migraines were so bad, he couldn’t even watch videos at one point,” Bliss recalls. “It’s amazing to see how far he’s come since day one. Before treating with HBOT, Sergeant Nick said he was pretty much a zombie because he was on many different medications for years. After HBOT,



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he has seen a drastic improvement in his quality of life.” According to Sergeant Nick, HBOT is the best treatment he has ever received. After trying every type of treatment available and every medication prescribed for him, he says HBOT helped him more in two days than a year’s worth of medications.

Oxygen Oasis is focused on bringing a greater awareness to this cause through its first annual “Nominate a Veteran Event,” in which two veterans are selected from a lengthy



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list of nominations sent in from the public. In partnering with the National Hyperbaric Association and the nonprofit organization Walking Point for PTSD & TBI, Bliss intends to continue to extend Oxygen Oasis’ outreach to veterans in need.

Although helping military veterans is a particular passion for Bliss, she’s happy when any individual benefits from the therapy—whether it’s someone with a non-healing wound, autism, chronic pain, stroke or other neurological condition (complete list of conditions treated can be found on Oxygen Oasis’ website; o2oasis.com). No matter the need, Bliss and her team at Oxygen Oasis stand ready to serve, one treatment at a time. ■