

DEVICES FOR HARVESTING A SKIN GRAFT

Related Application

The present applications claims the benefit of and priority to U.S. nonprovisional application serial number 12/851,656, filed August 6, 2010, the content of which is incorporated by reference herein in its entirety.

Field of the Invention

The present invention generally relates to devices for harvesting a skin graft.

Background

Skin is the largest organ of the human body, representing approximately 16% of a person's total body weight. Because it interfaces with the environment, skin has an important function in body defense, acting as an anatomical barrier from pathogens and other environmental substances. Skin also provides a semi-permeable barrier that prevents excessive fluid loss while ensuring that essential nutrients are not washed out of the body. Other functions of skin include insulation, temperature regulation, and sensation. Skin tissue may be subject to many forms of damage, including burns, trauma, disease, and depigmentation (e.g., vitiligo).

Skin grafts are often used to repair such skin damage. Skin grafting is a surgical procedure in which a section of skin is removed from one area of a person's body (autograft), removed from another human source (allograft), or removed from another animal (xenograft), and transplanted to a recipient site of a patient, such as a wound site. Harvesting of a skin graft may be accomplished by many different techniques, and the technique used will depend on the type of graft to be harvested. A common technique to harvest a skin graft includes suction blistering. Suction blistering involves two devices, one device to raise a suction blister and a separate device to cut the blister. The need for two devices slows the graft harvesting process and requires that suction blistering be performed in a doctor's office. Further, the need for separate devices has prevented development of an automated system for producing a skin graft.

Summary

The present invention provides a blister raising device integrated with a member for cutting the raised blister. The invention thus provides a single device that can raise a blister and cut the raised blister. Devices of the invention may raise and cut a plurality of blisters, or may raise and cut a single blister. The single blister may be used as a skin graft or may be further manipulated to produce an array of micrografts.

The mechanism for raising the blister may be any mechanism known in the art. In certain embodiments, a vacuum source for creating suction in the body is used. In other embodiments, a heat source for creating heat in the body is used. In certain embodiments, a combination of a vacuum source and a heating source is used. Devices of the invention may include a temperature regulator. In certain embodiments, the blister may be a fluid-filled blister (e.g. a suction blister). In other embodiments, the blister is not fluid-filled, i.e., raised skin having only air within. Device of the invention may be used to raise any type of blister (fluid-filled or not fluid-filled).

Cutting members for cutting raised blisters are known in the art. Devices of the invention may be integrated with any of those cutters, and the cutter used will depend on the type of graft(s) to be prepared. In certain embodiments, the cutter is a laser.

In certain embodiments, devices of the invention are configured to produce an epidermal graft, i.e., a graft that consists of substantially epidermal skin and does not include any substantial portion of the dermal layer.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Figure 1 provides a diagram showing the anatomy of skin.

Figure 2 panels A-C are schematics showing a device for generating and harvesting a plurality of micrografts. Panel A provides an exploded view of the device. Panel B provides a top view of the assembled device. Panel C provides a side view of the assembled device.

Figure 3 panels A-B is a drawing showing a device of the invention for raising a suction blister.

Figure 4 panels A-D show different devices of the invention for raising a suction blister.

Detailed Description

The present invention generally relates to a single device that can raise a blister (e.g., a suction blister) and cut the raised blister, i.e., a blister raising device integrated with a cutting member. Such devices are useful for harvesting skin grafts.

In certain embodiments, a device as shown in Figure 2 panels A-C is used to raise and cut a plurality of skin grafts. Device **200** includes a frame **201** and a lid **202**. Fitted into the frame is a bottom plate **203**, a cutter grid plate **204**, a cutter plate **205**, and a top plate **206**. The bottom plate **203**, the cutter plate **205**, and the top plate **206**, each include a hole array **211**. Once assembled, the hole array **211** of each of plates **203**, **205**, and **206** are aligned. The size of the holes in the hole array will depend on the size of the graft needed, with larger holes being used to produce larger grafts. A first substrate **207** interacts with the top plate **206** and will receive the harvested grafts.

Device **200** further includes an actuation block **208**, actuation bar **209**, and actuation block guides **210**. Actuation components **208**, **209**, and **210** control movement of the cutter plate **205**. The frame **201** includes a vacuum stop **212** and the lid **202** includes a suction hole barb **213**. Once assembled, the frame **201** and lid **202** are arranged such that the vacuum stop **212** and the suction hole barb **213** are aligned with each other (Figure 2 panel B). A vacuum source is then connected to the device **200** such that negative pressure can be generated within the device. The device **200** can be held together by clamp screws **214**. Device **200** may also include a heating element.

To produce and harvest the plurality of skin grafts, device **200** is placed on a donor site, such as an inner thigh of a patient. The vacuum source is turned on, producing negative pressure within device **200**. The negative pressure causes the skin to be pulled toward lid **202**, with a plurality of different portions of skin being pulled through each hole array **211** in each of plates **203**, **205**, and **206**. Such action results in generation of many microblisters. Once the microblisters are raised, actuation components **208**, **209**, and **210** are engaged to move cutter plate **205**. The movement of cutter plate **205** disrupts the alignment of the hole arrays **211** in each of plates **203**, **205**, and **206**, and results in cutting of the microblisters. The cut microblisters are captured on the first substrate **207** that is above top plate **206**. In this manner, there is provided a spaced apart array of micrografts. The amount of negative pressure applied, the amount of time the vacuum is maintained, and/or the depth of the holes in plate **206** (i.e., the plate thickness) determine what type of graft will be harvested, e.g., epidermal graft, split

thickness graft, or full thickness graft. Generally, each micrograft will have a lateral dimension of less than about 2 mm e.g., 100 to 2000 microns.

Another aspect of the invention provides a device for obtaining a single skin graft. Such devices of the invention include a hollow body having a distal end configured for placement on skin, a mechanism for raising a blister, and a cutter integrated in the body for cutting the blister produced on the skin.

In certain embodiments, a device as shown in Figure 3 panel A is used to obtain a skin graft. Device **400** includes a hollow body **401** and a mechanism for raising a blister **402**. Hollow body **401** includes a distal end **403** that is configured for placement on the skin. Such a distal end may include an orifice plate **404**. Orifice plate **404** determines the size and the shape of the blister or blisters that will be raised. Orifice plate **404** may be any shape or size and will depend on the blister to be raised. Generally, the diameter or lateral dimension of the blister may be from about 6 mm to about 12 mm, although larger or smaller blister sizes may be used.

The mechanism for raising a blister may be a vacuum component, a heating component, or a combination thereof. An exemplary heating component is a light source. In a particular embodiment, mechanism **402** is a combination of a vacuum component and a heating component.

The hollow body **401** further includes a cutter **405**, which includes cutter plate **406** and a hole **407** (Figure 3 panel B). Device **400** further includes an actuation block **408**, actuation bar **409**, and actuation block guides **410**. Actuation components **408**, **409**, and **410** control movement of the cutter **405**.

Blister formation is accomplished by attaching the distal end **403** of hollow body **401** to donor site of a patient, such as an inner thigh of a patient. Hook and loop fastener straps may be used to keep the device in place. The heating component of blister raising mechanism **402** provides a slight warming of orifice plate **404**, which is in direct contact with the patient's skin surface. The application of a moderate negative pressure to the chamber interior from the vacuum component of blister raising mechanism **402**, results in the patient's skin being gently drawn through the opening in orifice plate **404**. The result is a blister or blisters, approximately the size of the opening in orifice plate **404**. The produced blister may be fluid-filled or may not contain any fluid, i.e., a blister having air within. The skin and blister area is generally not damaged and patient discomfort is minimal.

The cutter **405** is positioned in hollow body **401** such that upon raising the blister, at least a portion of the blister protrudes through hole **407** in cutter plate **406**. The actuation components **408**, **409**, and **410** are engaged to move cutter plate **406**. The movement of cutter plate **406** disrupts the alignment of hole **407** with the other components of device **400**, and results in cutting of the raised blister.

Figure 4 panel A shows a device **500** that further includes a chamber **511** for capturing the cut blister. Chamber **511** is positioned in hollow body **501** and above cutter **505**. Chamber **511** may be removable from device **500**. Chamber **511** may include multiple configurations. For example, chamber **511** may include a retractable bottom. The bottom is in an open position when chamber **511** is inserted into hollow body **501**. In the open position, chamber **511** is able to receive the cut blister. Once the cut blister is in chamber **511**, the bottom of the chamber is closed, capturing the blister in chamber **511**. Chamber **511** may then be removed from device **500**.

In another embodiment, chamber **511** includes a substrate **512** (Figure 4 panel C). In this embodiment, device **500** is configured such that substrate **512** is positioned in chamber **511** so that upon raising the blister, a portion of the blister contacts the substrate and becomes attached to the substrate. Cutter **505** then cuts the blister, and the cut blister becomes attached to the substrate **512** in chamber **511**. Chamber **511** is then removed from device **500**, and substrate **512** may be removed from chamber **511**. In other devices, a vacuum, instead of a substrate, is used to hold the cut blister within the chamber.

In certain embodiments, device **500** does not use a chamber, rather a substrate **512** is directly integrated with device **500** in order to capture the cut blister (Figure 4, panel D). Once captured, substrate **512** having an attached cut blister may be removed from device **500**.

In certain embodiments, devices of the invention are configured to produce epidermal grafts. The skin consists of 2 layers. The outer layer, or epidermis, is derived from ectoderm, and the thicker inner layer, or dermis, is derived from mesoderm. The epidermis constitutes about 5% of the skin, and the remaining 95% is dermis. Figure 1 provides a diagram showing the anatomy of skin. The skin varies in thickness depending on anatomic location, gender, and age of the individual. The epidermis, the more external of the two layers, is a stratified squamous epithelium consisting primarily of melanocytes and keratinocytes in progressive stages of differentiation from deeper to more superficial layers. The epidermis has no blood vessels;

thus, it must receive nutrients by diffusion from the underlying dermis through the basement membrane, which separates the 2 layers.

The dermis is a more complex structure. It is composed of 2 layers, the more superficial papillary dermis and the deeper reticular dermis. The papillary dermis is thinner, including loose connective tissue that contains capillaries, elastic fibers, reticular fibers, and some collagen. The reticular dermis includes a thicker layer of dense connective tissue containing larger blood vessels, closely interlaced elastic fibers, and coarse, branching collagen fibers arranged in layers parallel to the surface. The reticular layer also contains fibroblasts, mast cells, nerve endings, lymphatics, and some epidermal appendages. Surrounding the components of the dermis is the gel-like ground substance composed of mucopolysaccharides (primarily hyaluronic acid), chondroitin sulfates, and glycoproteins.

In a graft, the characteristics of the donor site are more likely to be maintained after grafting to a recipient site as a function of the thickness of the dermal component of the graft. However, thicker grafts require more favorable conditions for survival due to the requirement for increased revascularization. It has been discovered, however, that a substantially epidermal graft according to the invention is more likely to adapt to the characteristics of the recipient site.

An epidermal graft refers to a graft that consists of substantially epidermal skin and does not include any substantial portion of the dermal layer. A split thickness graft refers to a graft that includes sheets of superficial (epithelial) and some deep layers (dermal) of skin. A full-thickness graft refers to a graft that includes all of the layers of the skin including blood vessels.

Devices of the invention may be used to harvest a skin graft(s) for repair of numerous different types of skin damage. For example, harvested grafts may be used to treat burns (e.g., both thermal and chemical burns), blistering, dermatological conditions (e.g., epidermolysis bullosa or pyoderma gangrenosum), radiation therapy ulcers, diabetic ulcers, ischemic ulcers, trophic ulcers, trauma, or depigmentation (e.g., vitiligo).

In particular embodiments, the skin graft(s) are used to treat vitiligo. Vitiligo is a chronic disorder that causes depigmentation of patches of skin. It occurs when melanocytes, the cells responsible for skin pigmentation, die or are unable to function. Although patches are initially small, they often enlarge and change shape. When skin lesions occur, they are most prominent on the face, hands and wrists. Some lesions have hyper-pigmentation around the edges.

Depigmentation is particularly noticeable around body orifices, such as the mouth, eyes, nostrils, genitalia and umbilicus.

Vitiligo is generally classified into two categories, non-segmental vitiligo and Segmental vitiligo. In non-segmental vitiligo (NSV), there is usually some form of symmetry in the location of the patches of depigmentation. New patches also appear over time and can be generalized over large portions of the body or localized to a particular area. Vitiligo where little pigmented skin remains is referred to as *vitiligo universalis*. Non-segmental vitiligo can come about at any age, unlike segmental vitiligo which is far more prevalent in teenage years.

Segmental vitiligo (SV) differs in appearance, aetiology and prevalence from associated illnesses. Its treatment is different from that of non-segmental vitiligo. It tends to affect areas of skin that are associated with dorsal roots from the spine. It spreads much more rapidly than non-segmental vitiligo and, without treatment, it is much more stable/ static in course and not associated with auto-immune diseases.

To treat vitiligo, an autograft is provided to the site of depigmented skin. The graft includes melanocytes, and thus upon the recipient site accepting the graft, the graft will produce pigmented skin at the recipient site. A donor site of pigmented skin is aseptically cleaned prior to harvesting of a skin graft. Standard methods are used to clean the donor site. A typical donor site is an inner thigh, but any area of pigmented skin may be used.

After cleaning, a skin grafted is harvested using devices of the invention. Devices described herein raise and cut a blister(s), such as a suction blister. The area of depigmented skin (i.e., the recipient site), is prepared through aseptic cleaning and dermabrasion. The graft(s) is applied to the dermabraded recipient site. The donor site and the recipient site are dressed and wound care is provided.

Incorporation by Reference

References and citations to other documents, such as patents, patent applications, patent publications, journals, books, papers, web contents, have been made throughout this disclosure. All such documents are hereby incorporated herein by reference in their entirety for all purposes.

Equivalents

The invention may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from the spirit

or essential characteristics thereof. The foregoing embodiments are therefore to be considered in all respects illustrative rather than limiting on the invention described herein. Scope of the invention is thus indicated by the appended claims rather than by the foregoing description, and all changes which come within the meaning and range of equivalency of the claims are therefore intended to be embraced therein.

What is claimed is:

1. A device for obtaining a skin graft, the device comprising:
 - a hollow body having a distal end configured for placement on skin;
 - a mechanism for raising at least one blister; and
 - a member integrated in said body for cutting said blister produced on said skin.
2. The device according to claim 1, wherein the mechanism is selected from the group consisting of a vacuum source for creating suction in said body; a heat source for generating heat in either a patient's body or the body of hollow body of the device; and a combination thereof.
3. The device according to claim 2, wherein the heat source is a light source.
4. The device according to claim 2, further comprising a temperature regulator.
5. The device according to claim 1, further comprising a chamber positioned above the cutter.
6. The device according to claim 5, wherein the chamber comprises a substrate.
7. The device according to claim 1, further comprising a substrate positioned above the member.
8. The device according to claim 5, wherein the chamber is removable.
9. The device according to claim 5, wherein the chamber is disposable.
10. The device according to claim 5, wherein the chamber is reusable.
11. The device according to claim 1, wherein the distal end of the body comprises a orifice plate.

12. A device for obtaining a skin graft, the device comprising
a hollow body having a distal end configured for placement on skin;
a mechanism for raising at least one blister;
a member integrated in said body for cutting said blister produced on said skin;
and
a chamber connected to the body, wherein the device is configured such that upon cutting of the blister, the cut portion of skin enters the chamber and is retained in the chamber.
13. The device according to claim 12, wherein the chamber is removable.
14. The device according to claim 12, wherein the chamber is disposable.
15. The device according to claim 12, wherein the chamber is reusable.
16. The device according to claim 12, wherein the chamber comprises a substrate.
17. A device for obtaining a skin graft, the device comprising
a hollow body having a distal end configured for placement on skin;
a mechanism for raising at least one blister;
a member integrated in said body for cutting said blister produced on said skin;
and
a substrate removably connected to the body, wherein the device is configured such that upon cutting of the blister, the cut portion of skin is attached to the substrate.
18. The device according to claim 17, wherein the substrate comprises an adhesive.