

The Herald

New light on how to give up the weed

LASER treatment to help people give up smoking is being funded by the NHS in Scotland for the first time, writes **Alan MacDermid, Medical Correspondent**.

The treatment, provided by an alternative therapist, was tried on staff at Monklands Hospital in Airdrie, nearly half of whom were still off cigarettes after a year. Half the cost – £80 per course – was paid for by the hospital.

Now therapist Anne Penman, who practises in the South Side of Glasgow, has taken on three patients a week since last September, paid for jointly by the Monklands NHS Trust and a local GP practice at the Welllwynd health Centre.

Mrs Penman said yesterday: "I use a cold laser, which looks a bit like a pen. It is aimed at acupuncture spots on the hands, nose, ears and wrists, and increases the endorphin levels to make you feel relaxed.

"I gave up smoking through it myself – I had been very sceptical up until then. My husband and I both smoked until he had a coronary and I decided I had to do something to support him.

"The treatment consists of a 35-minute session plus a follow-up session and whatever support is required. We also run a helpline."

Mark Kennedy, health promotion co-ordinator at the hospital, said: "The results of the staff experiment were quite remarkable, and we decided to identify patients at special risk from smoking-related diseases.

"Since smoking is a major factor in the cost of health services, we considered this approach to be worthwhile."