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Salon owner supports sufferers of trichotillomania — obsessive hair pulling

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Charlene Blacer at The Secret Mane in Stroudsburg will be hosting a support group for sufferers of trichotillomania, or 'trich,' who obsessively pull their hair.

Keith R. Stevenson/Pocono Record

By **MELANIE VANDERVEER**

Pocono Record Writer
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The feeling of being alone is something that many trichotillomania sufferers know all too well.

"Many people that suffer from this condition think that they are the only ones with this problem, and some of the younger ones do not tell their parents," said Charlene Blacer, owner of The Secret Mane hair salon. "Some of them are even afraid to go get a haircut because of guilt or shame or even fear of someone saying something negative."

Trichotillomania, also referred to as "trich," is a condition similar to obsessive-compulsive disorder in which the hair is obsessively pulled. Hair is pulled continuously, leaving bald patches. This condition is not only a medical problem but a psychological and cosmetic issue as well.

Most sufferers are female. "The condition is usually seen at the onset of puberty and affects more girls than boys," Blacer said. "We see clients of all ages. The youngest is 8 years old and the oldest is in her 60s." Blacer vows to help as many trich sufferers she can.

"This is a really shy subject," said Elena Roulhac, hair technologist. "It is a really sad condition."

Blacer has been helping clients with hair loss issues for more than 20 years. "I went to hair replacement school and opened three salons that specialize in hair restoration services," Blacer explained. "Over 50 percent of my clients have trich."

Oct. 5-11 is Trichotillomania Awareness Week in Pennsylvania. Blacer is hoping to get the word out that this is a serious condition that requires sufferers to find support.

"On October 8th, we will have a support group in the salon for people with trich," Blacer said. "It will be an educational mixer, a support type of event. We are hoping to do this group at least once a month in the future."

No single treatment has been documented as helpful, but there are some options. Cognitive behavioral therapy, certain medications and support groups have all been shown to help ease the condition.

Blacer is so passionate about helping trich patients that she has formed a nonprofit organization to raise money to help the cause. "The organization will help financially disadvantaged trich clients," Blacer said. "Hair extensions and hair pieces help a lot, and they can be expensive. The hair piece itself can help to break the cycle of hair pulling."

In a typical month, the three salons see about 30 to 40 trich clients. "The clients come from all over. I have a salon in New York, one in Philadelphia and the one in Stroudsburg. I have had people come from as far as Mexico and Canada," Blacer said.

"I've told countless people that trich is their problem, since many do not realize that this is an actual condition."

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IF YOU GO

What: Trichotillomania support group

Where: The Secret Mane, 572 Main St., Stroudsburg

When: Wednesday, Oct. 8, 6 p.m.

Who: Anyone who has trich or knows someone who suffers from it.

Why: Knowing that you are not alone or crazy.

Information:

www.theseecretmane.com or
www.trich.org

To RSVP: melissa@cybermane.com
or (570) 422-0882