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Richard Rox Anderson.

By **Scott Kirsner** | GLOBE COLUMNIST APRIL 14, 2017

If you've been zapped by a laser to remove unwanted hair or an impulsive tattoo, tried hair care products from Living Proof, or undergone a "CoolSculpting" treatment to combat cellulite bulges, you've been touched by technology that came out of the lab of one of Boston's most prolific researcher-entrepreneurs. While he isn't well-known to the general public, in the world of medical startups, he goes by one name: Rox.

Rox — officially Richard Rox Anderson — doesn't keep count of his patents. "I have no idea," he says when asked. (The tally on his official bio says the number is greater than 60.) He's involved with companies working on tough problems, such as regrowing hair and curing acne. And two companies based on his work, SevenOaks Biosystems and Zeltiq Aesthetics, have been acquired this year. Illinois-based Medline Industries quietly picked up Cambridge-based SevenOaks earlier in April for an undisclosed sum. But the price tag for Allergan's purchase of Zeltiq, which makes the CoolSculpting fat-reduction system, was so large it had to be disclosed: \$2.48 billion.

"I call him a modern-day Benjamin Franklin — and Franklin founded the university I'm at, so I'm not saying that lightly," says George Cotsarelis, a dermatology professor at the University of Pennsylvania. "They both have invented so many different things that affected different parts of your life." Anderson "developed virtually every laser used by dermatologists in their clinic," Cotsarelis says. His work spans the superficial, such as reducing wrinkles around your eyes, and the serious, such as eliminating dark red birthmarks that can complicate a child's social interactions.

But the entrepreneurs and investors who have worked to turn Anderson's research into real-world products describe him as "probably the most modest person I've ever met," in the words of Sameer Sabir, chief executive of SevenOaks. "He's never self-promotional,"

PureTech Ventures founder Daphne Zohar says. Anderson, 66, himself admits, "I'm a hider."

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Anderson came to Cambridge from Illinois to study physics and electrical engineering at MIT. He says he "spent my twenties figuring out what I was going to do," including teaching school in Vermont and doing odd jobs around Boston. In the early 1970s, he found work as a technician at a lab at Massachusetts General Hospital, working with two dermatologists who were studying how ultraviolet light could be used to treat conditions like psoriasis. That led him to med school.

"As a medical student, he got interested in birthmarks like hemangiomas, studying the microanatomy of how these formed," says John Parrish, one of the dermatologists who mentored Anderson at Mass. General and later became a collaborator. "He thought that by using lasers of a certain wavelength, you could heat up the abnormal blood vessel and destroy it without causing any scarring. There was no such laser with those properties, so he talked a guy who was building lasers, and it worked — it got rid of the hemangiomas without any scarring." That technology was licensed to Candela Laser Corp., which still operates in Wayland. A different laser Anderson developed, the fractional laser, could help wounds heal more naturally without scarring.

"I'm not an entrepreneur," Anderson says, "just a researcher who likes to solve problems." He says he's driven by getting "pissed off when I see somebody in trouble, but I can't help."

As an example, he cites acne. "The second most common cause of teenage death is suicide, and acne can be a big factor in that," Anderson says. "I

want to cure acne; I don't want to treat it." He's involved with a Colorado startup, still operating under the radar, called Accure Acne.

Part of the way Anderson gets ideas is by continuing to see patients, in addition to overseeing research at the Wellman Center for Photomedicine at Mass. General. He also heads into the operating room about twice a month and practices at the Shriner's Hospital, "so I can take kids with no money." He has worked to open laser treatment centers for children with burns, birthmarks, and other skin conditions in Vietnam and Armenia.

The squeamish might not want to hear about Anderson's latest venture, SevenOaks, which aims to help people with bad wounds. Typically, a skin graft is taken from another part of the body, but that leaves a scar. Trying to grow new skin in a lab, often using stem cells, is slow and expensive. A device designed by SevenOaks quickly collects several hundred "microcolumns" of skin — from the surface to the fat underneath — and then applies them to wound site so that skin can grow again. It's all done with just a local anesthetic.

Men of a certain age have been eagerly tracking another Anderson company, Boston-based Follica. Cofounded by Anderson and Cotsarelis at the University of Pennsylvania, the company hopes to combine a medical device and drug to stimulate hair growth. Zohar at PureTech says Follica is getting ready to publish some of the results of its clinical studies and marching toward what it hopes will be eventual approval from the Food and Drug Administration. (PureTech is an investment firm in Boston that helps form ventures such as Follica.)

Olivo Labs, yet another company with ties to Anderson, unveiled some of its early research last year. It is developing a polymer layer that would stay on your skin for days. Among its possible applications: soothing severe eczema, protection from sunburn, or tightening up the saggy skin under your eyes.

Anderson is showing no signs of sagging himself. He has two children under the age of 2, and when he's not seeing patients, advising companies, or overseeing research, he plays the

banjo.

Venture capitalist Amir Nashat, who has worked with Anderson on several companies, notes that dermatologists don't get the same accolades as brain surgeons or cancer warriors. Nashat says that Anderson probably doesn't care. "He's always thinking about the next problem," Nashat says.

"I don't think it has ever been about money for Rox," says Bob Langer, an MIT professor who has collaborated with Anderson on several startups, including Olivo. "It's really this desire not just to be a pure academic and write good papers, but to really invent things and have those things get out to the world and help patients."

Scott Kirsner is a journalist and cofounder of Innovation Leader, a business information provider, and Future Forward, which puts on an annual conference. He can be reached at kirsner@pobox.com. Follow Scott on Twitter [@ScottKirsner](https://twitter.com/ScottKirsner).

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