

New Center City limb restoration clinic already looking for bigger space amid high demand



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Dr. Dan Zlotolow established the Philadelphia Hand to Shoulder Center Limb Restoration Clinic with Drs. Matthew Wilson and Adam Strohl.

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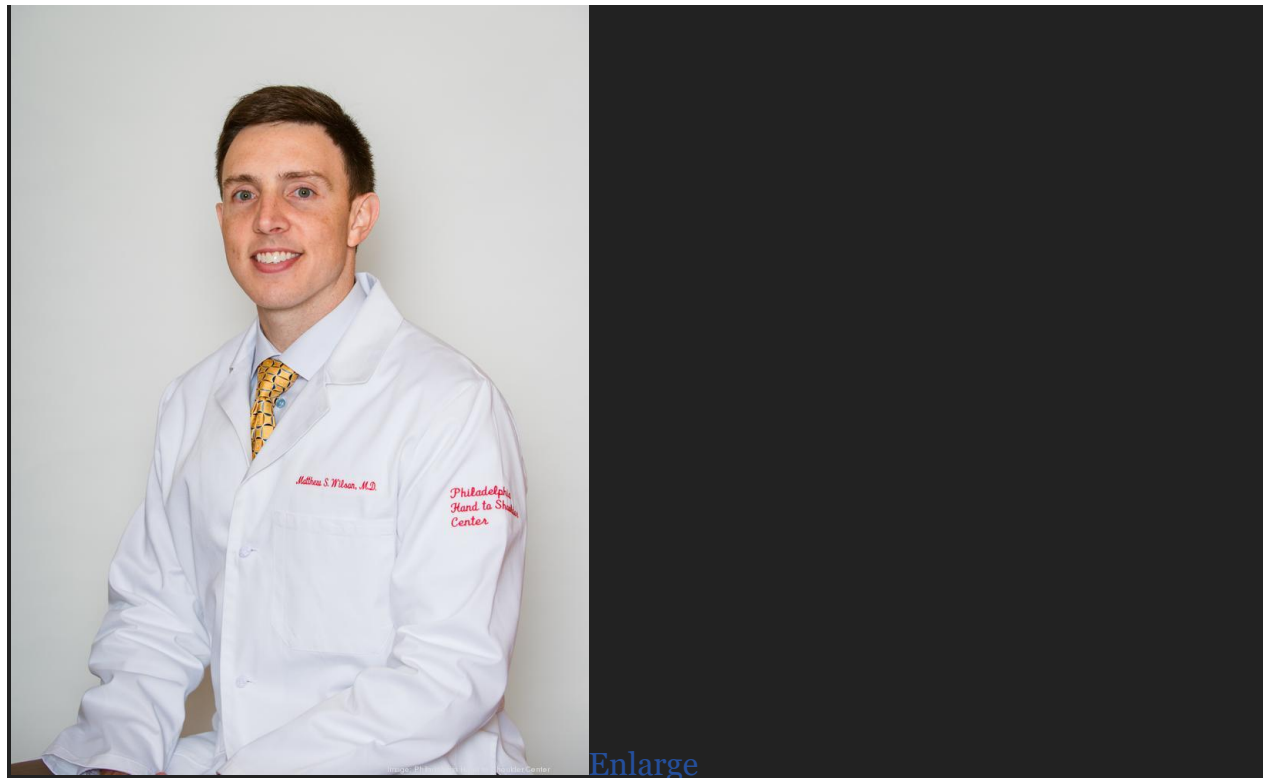
By [John George](#) – Senior Reporter, Philadelphia Business Journal
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A few weeks before the Covid-19 outbreak began, a trio of doctors at the Philadelphia Hand to Shoulder Center established the Limb Restoration Clinic in Center City to care for patients with an array of complex conditions that limit limb function.

The clinic, which is open the third Friday of every month, had to temporarily shut down because of state mandated Covid-related closings during March and April. Since May, however, business has not slowed down — with 15 to 20 patients the norm for each afternoon session.

Discussions are already taking place about moving the clinic to the Hand to Shoulder Center's office at the Philadelphia Navy Yard, where parking is free and more space would be available for patient care.

"The impetus was to create a center where physicians, therapists, prosthetists [and other specialists] could evaluate and treat patients at one location," said Dr. [Matthew Wilson](#), who established the clinic with his colleagues Drs. [Adam Strohl](#) and [Dan Zlotolow](#). "These patients have very complex conditions and a lot of dysfunction. They need a lot of attention — more attention than you can give them in a typical 10-minute appointment. For a new patient, we can spend 30 minutes to up to an hour with them."

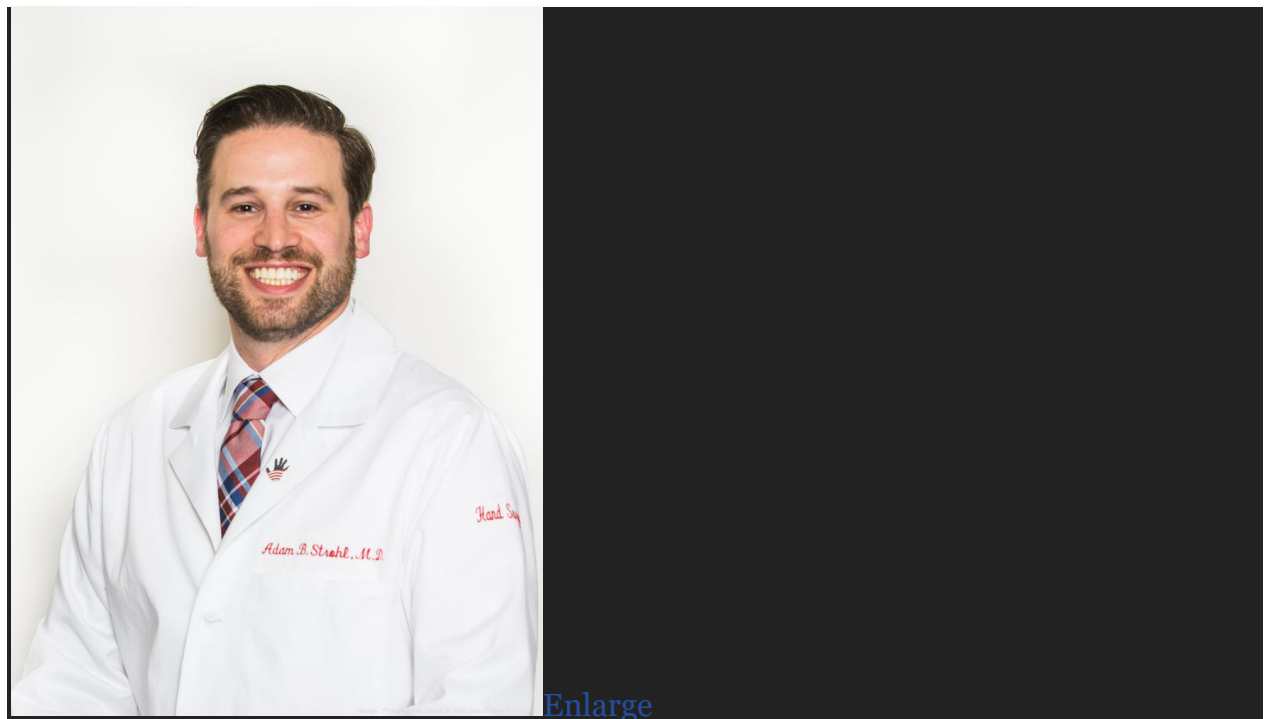


Dr. Matthew Wilson of the Philadelphia Hand to Shoulder Center.
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Strohl said the "one-stop shopping" single clinic concept removes the hassle patients with limb disorders face when they have to go to one site to be evaluated, another to receive therapy and another to meet with a specialist about a prosthetic if one becomes needed. "It can take months. The patient gets exhausted and can give up after awhile," he said.

For those patients who aren't able-bodied, Strohl said, there is a comfort with being only with other patients in a similar situation.

"When you are missing a limb," he said, "you don't want to be in a waiting room with people who have all their limbs. And we can create a camaraderie and an environment where amputees and other patients can learn from each other. ... Spinal cord patients receiving therapy feed off each other. They know what the other patients' injuries are and when they took place, and they can see the progress they are making. A patient will say, 'I'm going to get there one day and that's what I will need to go through.'"



Dr. Adam Strohl of the Philadelphia Hand to Shoulder Center.

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The clinic, which typically has a staff of about five augmented by a couple of physician fellows in advanced training, has seen patients from ages 18 to 81, and has had patients travel as far as three hours for an appointment. The patients all have complex conditions that limit limb function resulting from congenital disorders, disease or traumatic injuries.

Examples include peripheral nerve injuries, spinal cord injuries, stroke, traumatic brain injuries, multiple sclerosis, amputations, congenital limb deficiencies, and cancer.

The clinic's focus is on conditions and injuries to the hand, wrist, arm, elbow and shoulder. Some occurred recently, while others occurred years ago.

Strohl said patient referrals come largely by word of mouth.

"That phrase 'If you build it, they will come' has turned out to be very true," he said. "If you take care of one patient well, the word gets out because the patients talk to each other and the doctors talk and the rehab nurses talk and the therapists talk. The word starts circulating that something like this is available."

Zlotolow said there are very few clinics nationwide, and probably worldwide, that take on the kind of patients the Hand to Shoulder clinic is treating.

"The only one coordinated clinic like this we know of is [OrthoCarolina's Reconstructive Center for Lost Limbs] in Charlotte," he said. "We sort of took their model to treat pretty serious nerve injuries and devastating limb injuries that are generally ignored. What happens is, we see this a lot, patients get bounced around from place to place. And many places just don't have the expertise or the interest to take care of them."

Zlotolow said the clinic has brought together a multi-specialty clinic with prosthetists, plastic surgery elements, orthopedic surgery and nerve surgery at one site.

Strohl said their goal is always to restore patients' upper extremity function to improve the quality of life and help get them back to work if possible.

The doctors said their desire with the clinic is to get patients into the health care system sooner when more can be done to help them. They said complexities in the health insurance system create gaps in care for many of their patients, some of whom lose their jobs and their work health insurance — but don't immediately qualify for government health programs because of the time it takes to be declared permanently disabled.

"This really is a labor of love for us," Zlotolow said. "The hardest thing for us is to see these patients who come in years late. We love to have the conversations where we say we can help. We hate it when we have to say it's too late."