MedEsthetics®

THE GUIDE FOR EXCELLENCE IN MEDICAL AESTHETICS

May/June 2024
Volume 20, Number 4
medestheticsmag.com

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SAAMI KHALIFIAN, M.D.,
Combats the Commodification of Medical Aesthetics

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PLUS:
- Cosmetic Misuse of Ozempic Controversy
- Building a Strategic Retail Program

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Aesthetics Visionary: Saami Khalifian, M.D.





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Neurocosmetics: The Mind/Body Connection

The inextricable connection between physical, mental and skin health is becoming ever more apparent and the aesthetics industry is catching on to the significant advantage of considering all three when it comes to providing optimal patient care and treatment results. Our May/June Aesthetics Visionary, Saami Khalifian, M.D., understands this connection all too well with his patient-centric approach to aesthetics, grounded in prioritizing mental health and medical precision in aesthetics diagnosis and treatment. This is now extending beyond the treatment room, drawing the interest of professional skin care brands now launching medical-grade neuroscometic skin care products. The development of neurocosmetics aligns with the current paradigm shift in how industry professionals approach aesthetics to account for patient mental health in relation to their aesthetic goals. Neurocosmetics are designed to combine skin care and neurology, a groundbreaking approach to formulations centered around utilizing a comprehensive understanding of the fundamental and complex relationship between the mind, the neurological system and skin health. These formulas integrate novel ingredients that target neural receptors in the skin to work synergistically with the neurological system to treat skin conditions resulting from stress, support cellular renewal and skin resilience. Neurocosmetics are taking traditional topical skin care ingredients and combining them with ingredients that support skin health from the inside out, making for a comprehensive approach to improving skin health and appearance - all within one product.



Revision Skincare CMT Post-Procedure Cream is the first neurocosmetic post-procedure cream proven to decrease discomfort and reduce downtime following chemical peels, microneedling and laser treatments. The cream features Revision's patent-pending neurocosmetic technology to provide relief and decrease discomfort post-treatment, counteract the effects of skin stress to support the body's well-being molecule, support the recovery process by actively calming skin, help support regenerating the epidermal barrier, replenishe and reset the native microbiome for enhanced recovery, promote long-term skin health and support collagen production to help strengthen skin integrity.
revisionskincare.com



Problem Skin Elixir by Face It Skin is designed for deeper stubborn acne caused by hormones. It has slow-release retinol encapsulated in vegetable oil that releases on demand, working on cell turnover (pigmentation) and fine lines. Partnered with salicylic acid, it aids in reducing inflammation, redness and waste in clogged pores. Tested on people with real skin issues, this elixir helps cells of hormonal acne turnover faster to reduce the appearance of blackheads and whiteheads. It also helps the pigmentation from acne cycles faster, reducing the appearance of dark spots. Plus, it cleans pores for a tighter pore response. Vitamin C aids in clearing up acne while senses are ignited with thyme (increases circulation), rosemary (decongests, inflammation), cypress (balance sebum), lavender (antimicrobial) and milk thistle (helps skin repair). Combining these ingredients on the skin signals the brain for a positive skin response action.
faceitskin.net



Murad Revitalixir Recovery Serum is a sphere-infused serum for the face and eyes that combats signs of stress-induced aging, smoothing stress lines, reducing under-eye puffiness and dark circles and renewing vibrancy immediately and over time. A skin-relaxing blend of neuropeptide, paracress and cannabis sativa seed oil helps smooth stress lines while boosting softness and moisture. Niacinamide refines texture as wild indigo helps calm stress signals and visibly reduces under-eye dark circles and caffeine re-invigorates tone while minimizing under-eye puffiness. This serum provides a neurocosmetic instant pick-me-up that continues to improve over time.
murad.com

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aerolase®
CLEAR SKIN SUMMER

This summer, embrace the power of Aerolase Neo Elite®, the leading solution in treating acne that leverages advanced laser technology to offer dermatologists and their patients a breakthrough in skin health. Recent studies show that the Neo Elite has proven highly effective in reducing overactive sebum production and inflammation - the primary causes of acne breakouts. For those seeking to expand their treatment offerings or find the most effective acne treatment solution, the Neo Elite is the superior choice to help your patients enjoy a #ClearSkinSummer.

Optimizing Acne Outcomes with Aerolase

Aerolase Neo Elite differentiates itself with its ability to precisely target a desired area without the concern of damaging the surrounding tissue. When treating acne, the distinct 650-microsecond pulse, generated in a 1064nm wavelength, specifically targets the vessels surrounding the sebaceous glands and dermal water content. This precision optimizes the therapy, directly addressing the primary pathogenic factors of acne.

The Neo Elite not only effectively reduces mild to severe acne lesion counts by 87%, but also achieves high patient satisfaction and compliance. It reports over 90% patient compliance for ease of use and pain levels. In a survey among 50 dermatologists, an average of 6.5 patients per week were treated using this device, with 92% acknowledging that the Neo Elite outperforms other energy-based devices in clinical settings. Additionally, its capability to treat multiple dermatological conditions beyond acne, such as rosacea and hyperpigmentation, further amplifies its return on investment, making it an indispensable tool in medical aesthetics. The versatility achieved through Neo Elite's unique energy delivery also addresses the physical sequelae post-acne, such as post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation, erythema, and acne scars.

Clinical Insights and Proven Efficacy

Studies led by renowned dermatologists Nazanin Saedi, MD, and Christine C. Dierickx, MD, have illuminated the significant advantages of the 650-microsecond, 1064-nm Nd:YAG laser therapy. Here's what they found:

84%
Reduction at end of treatment course

87%
Reduction at 90-days post-treatment course (continued lesion clearance)

90-95%
Satisfaction during and after treatment

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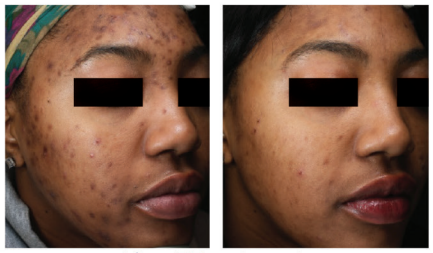
After 2 Treatments


After 5 Treatments


After 12 Treatments


After 1 Neo Treatments combined with microneedling and algae peel


After 4 Treatments


After 4 Treatments

Treatment Efficacy and Comfort:

- Patient Comfort: Highly comfortable experience with no need for extensive skin preparation.
- Effective: Quick and simple 15-minute treatments with a single operator, allowing for a more streamlined patient and provider experience.
- Comprehensive: Addresses existing breakouts by reducing sebum and inflammation, plus destroys p. acnes bacteria. Also addresses the physical sequelae of acne including PIH, PIE, and scars.
- Device Maintenance: Robust design with low maintenance requirements, enhancing clinic operational efficiency.

Long-Term Patient Care:

- Safe for all skin types, enhancing skin health without compromising long-term skin integrity from destruction of sebaceous units and the microbiome.

Discover how the Aerolase Neo Elite can transform your approach to acne treatment. Join us in achieving clearer, healthier skin this summer. Dive deeper into the technology and benefits by visiting our website or contacting our sales team. Make Aerolase Neo Elite your tool for success during the "Clear Skin Summer" and beyond.

"One of our favorite tools in our office is the Aerolase. This is a 650-microsecond laser so that's different in terms of the wavelength and the pulse duration that's there. It allows us to treat melasma, hyperpigmentation, but most commonly for acne, skin tightening, and even those little pesky blood vessels that we see on the face and around the nose."

Suneel Chilukuri, MD



Scan to find out more or set up a demo

LATEST IN LITERATURE

Lack of Dermatological Literature on Skin of Color

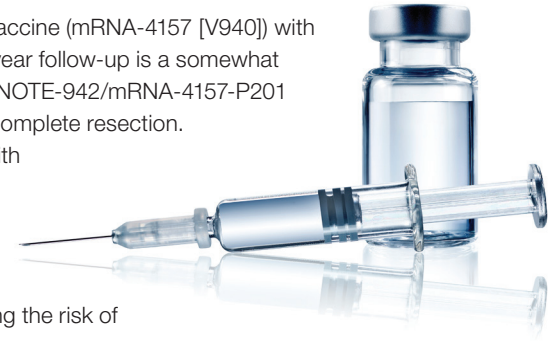


A 2023 study revealed that skin disease in people of color is under-diagnosed, often goes untreated and is more deadly, due to a lack of experience and proper training in the differences presented in variable skin types. Per the study, the 5-year survival rate is 66% for non-Hispanic/Black patients, compared with 90% for non-Hispanic Whites. The risk of surgical delay for melanoma was found to be increased in non-White patients. Nonmelanoma skin cancer (NMSC) in Black patients is uncommon with an incidence of 3.4 per 100,000, however Black patients present with later-stage or more aggressive Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC).

According to data presented at the Maui Derm Hawaii 2024 conference in Wailea, Hawaii, there is a significant gap in the representation of sunscreen use in patients of color within medical literature. Per the report, from 1988 to 2022, approximately 4.35% of the total 5760 papers referencing sunscreen focused on patients with skin of color. Researchers noted that the majority of these papers emerged post-2007, with a substantial increase noted since 2014. As of June 2022, 21% of total sunscreen papers were dedicated to patients with skin of color, indicating a potential record-high for the year.

The report revealed a predominant focus on sunscreen knowledge and patient behaviors, while clinical trials were notably scarce. The breakdown by condition and ethnicity underscored variations in coverage, with American Indians and Pacific Islanders identified as particularly underserved.

Development of mRNA Vaccine for Melanoma



Moderna has published the results of a phase 2b trial combining its mRNA vaccine (mRNA-4157 [V940]) with Merck's cancer drug KEYTRUDA. The presented mid-term data from the 3-year follow-up is a somewhat promising development in the treatment of melanoma. The randomized KEYNOTE-942/mRNA-4157-P201 clinical trial involves patients with high-risk (stage III/IV) melanoma following complete resection.

Relapse Risk Halved Treatment with mRNA-4157 (V940) in combination with pembrolizumab led to a clinically meaningful improvement in recurrence-free survival, reducing the risk for recurrence or death by 49%, compared with pembrolizumab alone, per the study. The combination of mRNA-4157 (V940) with pembrolizumab also demonstrated a meaningful improvement in distant metastasis-free survival compared with pembrolizumab alone, reducing the risk of developing distant metastasis or death by 62%, per the study.

The combined treatment did not demonstrate more significant side effects than pembrolizumab alone. The number of patients reporting treatment-related adverse events of grade 3 or greater was similar between the arms (25% for mRNA-4157 [V940] with pembrolizumab vs 20% for KEYTRUDA alone). The most common adverse events of any grade attributed to mRNA-4157 (V940) were fatigue (60.6%), injection site pain (56.7%) and chills (49%). Moderna and Merck announced the launch of a phase 3 trial, assessing "mRNA-4157 [V940] in combination with pembrolizumab as adjuvant treatment in patients with high-risk resected melanoma [stages IIB-IV]."

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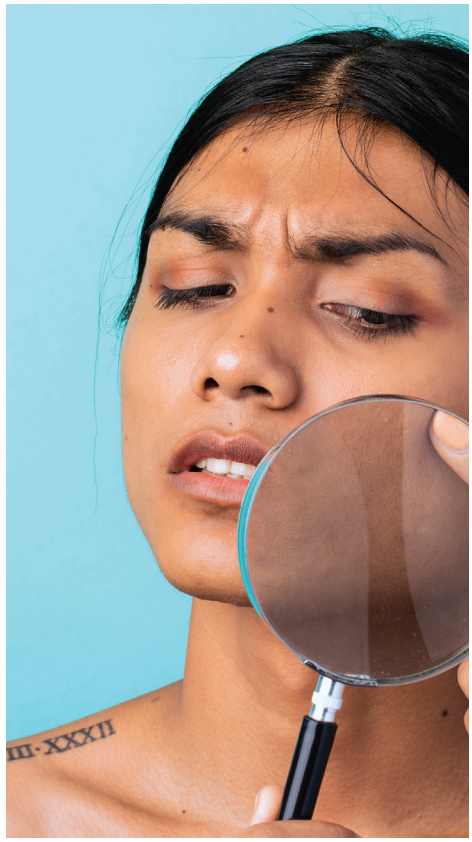

Acne Interferes with Gender Expressions in Transgender Patients

A January 2024 study on the JAMA Dermatology Network looked at the lived experiences of acne stigma and treatments in transgender and gender-diverse patients. The study found that acne can interfere with desired gender expression and contribute to negative stigmas and stereotypes towards gender-diverse individuals. Participants also noted a lack of transgender-specific acne care education and a general mistrust toward the health care system.

A total of 32 participants were included in the study, 17 transgender men, 11 transgender women and four nonbinary participants. Ten participants self-rated their skin as currently clear or almost clear, 11 reported mild acne and 11 had moderate to severe acne. Interviews exploring the experience of acne and acne treatment were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, coded using minority stress theory and the socioecological model and analyzed using thematic analysis. Themes were triangulated with survey data on gender, self-reported acne severity, skin-specific quality-of-life impact and treatment experience.

Transgender women in the study reported acne interfering with feminine gender expression. Transgender men often normalized acne development, sometimes viewing acne positively as an early sign of testosterone action. Most participants tried over-the-counter acne treatments and commonly sought acne treatment advice from physicians, peers, online forums and social media. Barriers to acne treatments identified in the study include cost, lack of multidisciplinary care, mistrust toward the health care system and lack of transgender-specific acne care education.



Cysteamine Isobionic-Amide Complex is Potential Long-Term mKF Alternative

A study in the February 2024 issue of the *Journal of Drugs in Dermatology* (JDD) explores the effectiveness of a new cysteamine isobionic-amide complex in comparison to the Modified Kligman's Formula (mKF), a longstanding cornerstone in melasma treatment. The clinical trials analyzed 80 patients across three groups, for 16 weeks, treated with the Cysteamine Isobionic-Amide complex, a placebo and mKF. Evaluations included the modified Melasma Area Severity Index (mMASI) scores, spectrophotometric analyses, dermatological assessments and patient-reported feedback and satisfaction, including quality-of-life scores.

As early as week 4, the Cysteamine Isobionic-Amide complex demonstrated an onset of action comparable to mKF, significantly reducing melasma severity and improving overall skin condition by week 16. Both Cysteamine Isobionic-Amide complex and mKF showed significant decrease in spectrophotometric pigmentation contrast at week 8 and 16, and in mMASI at week 4, 8 and 16, with no significant difference between both Cysteamine Isobionic-Amide complex and mKF at each timepoint and for both endpoints (mMASI and pigmentation contrast), per the study.

Patients treated with the Cysteamine Isobionic-Amide complex reported higher satisfaction levels and a notable improvement in quality of life, positioning this new complex as a viable long-term treatment alternative to mKF. The findings suggest that the Cysteamine Isobionic-Amide complex not only matches the efficacy of mKF but also surpasses it in terms of patient experience and safety profile, offering a significant advancement in melasma management.

From top: Image by rawpixel.com; Orathai at Adobe Stock



FDA Clearance for DermaSensor's Skin Cancer Evaluation Device

DermaSensor Inc. has announced FDA clearance for its real-time, non-invasive skin cancer evaluation system. It is the first AI-powered medical device that detects all three common skin cancers (melanoma, basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma). DermaSensor's AI-powered spectroscopy technology can non-invasively evaluate cellular and subcellular characteristics of a lesion in question for skin cancer. The wireless, handheld device provides an immediate result using an FDA-cleared algorithm.

The FDA's pivotal study led by the Mayo Clinic to validate device performance showed that the device had a sensitivity of 96% across all 224 skin cancers. A negative result had a 97% chance of being benign for all skin cancers. In a companion clinical utility study with 108 physicians, the DermaSensor device was found to decrease the number of missed skin cancers by half (from 18% to only 9%), increasing the physicians' accuracy and confidence in assessing cancerous lesions. DermaSensor has conducted 13 clinical studies in the last decade, six of which provided the principal support for FDA clearance.

MatriDerm Collagen-Elastin Template for Soft Tissue Reconstruction



The effectiveness of MatriDerm was demonstrated in a clinical study conducted at the University Medical Center in Dresden, Germany. MatriDerm is a dermal template manufactured by MedSkin Solutions Dr Suwelack, AG. The unique collagen-elastin-template serves as a dermal replacement scaffold and can be applied both in a one- and multi-step procedure. The study highlights MatriDerm's role in reducing operating room time, avoiding flap surgery in up to 80% of cases and eliminating donor site morbidities associated with traditional flap procedures.

Diana Ferro, CEO of Medskin Solutions Dr Suwelack, commented, "MatriDerm is not just a dermal matrix; it's a solution that addresses the multifaceted challenges of soft tissue reconstruction."

The economic implications of MatriDerm's application identified in the study are significant. By reducing operating room time and the necessity for flap surgeries, hospitals and healthcare facilities can allocate resources more efficiently, ultimately leading to cost savings and improved patient outcomes. Patients benefit from a reduction in the risk of complications that are typical for flap surgery and a quicker return to their daily lives, underscoring MatriDerm's value in patient care.

Jason Gugliuzza, vice president and head of medcare division, said, "MatriDerm has been engineered to support the body's natural healing process, providing a scaffold for cell ingrowth and skin regeneration. This not only accelerates recovery, but also significantly reduces the need for more invasive and costly surgical interventions. This study is truly significant in not only impacting clinical practice but also underlining the economic benefits of MatriDerm."

From top: courtesy of DermaSensor; Image by Mdv Edwards at Adobe Stock

UI: A Life-Changing Solution to This Silent Epidemic

PF Toner*Pro* is life-changing for patients suffering in silence. **By Rebecca Lane**

Urinary incontinence (UI) is a condition too many men and women suffer with in silence; one that severely affects patients' quality of life. This silent epidemic often leaves patients feeling ashamed and too embarrassed to seek help apart from the woefully insufficient and outdated solution of adult diapers. "It greatly affects patients' quality of life because it is difficult for them to carry out daily activities, such as physical exercises and social and sexual relations. It currently constitutes a silent epidemic, since many still remain silent about it," says Dr. Ernesto Delgado Cidranes.

You may never have considered treating UI in your aesthetics practice. However, you can now treat this condition non-invasively with an unprecedented degree of effectiveness while the patient is comfortable and fully clothed. This is a gamechanger for many patients suffering in silence.

The PF Toner*Pro*

While the PF Toner*Pro* was recently FDA-cleared in the USA for the treatment of UI, Zimmer MedizinSystems' parent company in Germany has been a global leader in medical devices for over 50 years, allowing Dr. Cidranes and others to use this treatment for some time. The PF Toner*Pro* utilizes magnetic field therapy to induce a current into cells, causing pelvic floor muscle contractions. These repeated contractions build and tone the tissue. Treatments are tailored to individual patient parameters, with four predefined programs for general pelvic floor strengthening and addressing stress, mixed and urge incontinence. Patients experience improved continence through targeted strengthening of pelvic floor muscles.

PF Toner*Pro* Treatment Efficacy

A clinical study evaluating the safety and efficacy of PF Toner*Pro* demonstrated it was effective in treating 97% of participants, with over 90% maintaining improvement after three months. In addition, 95.2% of patients exhibited elastographic changes and improved muscle tone. "PF Toner*Pro* is very effective. In patients with severe UI, the progression of reduced degrees of incontinence is very satisfactory, although we can't say they remain completely "dry." The results are currently exceptional, as the focused magnetic therapy constitutes an important tool allowing us to treat different types of UI. Protocols are applied based on personalized diagnosis, avoiding the need for surgery," explains Dr. Cidranes.

What's more, patients experience improved continence soon after starting treatment. "After the 3rd session,



patients begin to experience positive changes. Manual physiotherapy on its own, for example, takes longer to have a positive response or be resolved with the percentage currently being evaluated." Dr. Cidranes shares the breakthrough for his practice's ability to address idiopathic pelvic pain. "For years we applied pelvic floor magnetic coils, seeking greater efficiency in muscle control. In most cases of pelvic pain, they served as irritating elements, bothersome at the level of neuropathic pain. We solved this with the PF Toner*Pro* approach."

Improving Quality of Life: Mental, Social & Sexual Benefits

The potential benefits of the PF Toner*Pro* extend beyond UI. Patients experience improved mental health and quality of social and sexual life. Improved sexual function is a natural byproduct of pelvic floor strengthening and increasing blood flow to this area. "Some postpartum and menopausal patients have reported improved vaginal relaxation and orgasmic response. Pelvic floor health and erectile dysfunction also have a great ally in magnetic stimulation, and we have seen encouraging results for symptom control and reduction of fecal incontinence and UI secondary to prostatectomy."



Ernesto Delgado Cidranes, M.D.

No matter how you look at it, PF Toner*Pro* is a vital tool to help your male and female patients suffering from this silent UI epidemic.

PF Toner Pro
Pelvic Floor Therapy

Photos courtesy of Zimmer











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3 GEL TONER

Osmia Purely Calm Gel Toner acts like a serum while toning the skin with a firming gel structure that stays put as the hydrating active ingredients penetrate for maximum absorption.

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4 LIPID BODY TREATMENT

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Contact: 720.541.8296, epicutis.com

5 CONCENTRATED RETINOL TREATMENTS

Dr. Dennis Gross Skincare Advanced Retinol + Ferulic Perfectly Dosed Retinol Universal 0.2% and Extra Strength 0.5% are concentrated treatments powered by pure liquid retinol designed to visibly reduce lines and wrinkles, smooth texture and boost radiance.

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Multicultural Skin Aging

Here, industry experts discuss some of their favorite product innovations for treating a wide spectrum of skin types and colors.

"Hyperpigmentation is a complex skin issue that affects different skin tones in unique ways so finding the right treatment can sometimes be challenging. SkinMedica's Even and Correct line addresses this by offering a comprehensive solution that works across various skin types and tones. This hydroquinone-free collection includes the Advanced Brightening Treatment, Dark Spot Cream and Brightening Treatment Pads. The products contain the proprietary LTN Complex, featuring Ultra-Concentrated Lotus Sprout Extract to harness the most powerful properties that address skin discoloration, Tranexamic Acid to reduce the appearance of dark spots and Niacinamide to reduce the appearance of skin discoloration and fine lines. Whether used together or individually, Even and Corrects offers effective solutions for a wide spectrum of hyperpigmentation concerns such as melasma and post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation."

—Prithwiraj Maitra, Ph.D., vice president, Global Skincare R&D, Allergan Aesthetics

"Using ultrasound technology, Sofwave stimulates collagen, elastin and hyaluronic acid production, resulting in tighter, more radiant skin on both the face and body—without downtime. Patients appreciate the convenience of quick treatments that allow them to resume their active lifestyles immediately. Sofwave's sofcool technology ensures skin safety while delivering energy at the optimal depth for best results. Its timely arrival coincides with many embarking on wellness and weight loss journeys. Virtually anyone qualifies as a candidate, and its safety across all skin types and colors sets it apart as a leader in the field."

— Johnny Franco, M.D., and staff at Austin Plastic Surgeon.

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BUSINESS CONSULT BY TERRI ROSS



7 Steps to Build a Strategic Retail Program in Your Aesthetic Practice

How to build a strategic retail program from start to finish.

Do you know your retail to service/procedure ratio?

Are your retail sales accounting for 20% of your overall monthly revenue?

If you answered no to either of those questions, you are not alone! That's why I wanted to take this opportunity to explain how incorporating retail products into your practice can substantially strengthen your sales program, increase patient satisfaction, boost profitability and increase patient retention. All things vital to patient outcomes and a healthy practice.

Key Aspects of a Successful Retail Program

The key to a successful retail program is to focus on products that compliment your treatments/services and procedures. Don't try to be a one-stop-shop. Carefully define what products will augment your offerings, research the options, have the reps come in and perform an in-service and ask to evaluate the products in addition to understanding the numbers and the support the company offers.

Once you've selected your vendors and the lines you want to carry (my recommendation is no more than three to four

Image by TanyaJoy at Adobe Stock

SKU's) then spend the time and resources necessary to train your staff and integrate the products into your personalized treatment plans. After you've launched your retail program, follow up on the numbers and adjust as necessary to fine tune and maximize profitability.

My motto is, "Always be educating." If you're not, or your team is not, statistics show your patients will go to a department store or CVS and buy products, which obviously do not add value or translate to the best outcomes.

7 Steps to Building a Retail Program

1. Define Your Niche

The most important step in building a successful retail program is defining your niche with the products you offer. The products you choose should be carefully tailored to your long-term treatment plans (more on this in a bit). Don't try to offer every product on the market. This will overwhelm your patients and will negatively impact your retail profitability. Why? Because patients will feel less like they are being offered a product to enhance their specialized treatment/procedure, and more like they are being sold as many products as possible to increase their overall expenses. When you focus on a specific retail line, you give patients the impression that you have carefully selected a product that will complement their services/procedure, leading to increased patient satisfaction and trust. By focusing on a particular product line, you also give your staff the opportunity to really learn the products, applications and relevant technology. Their ability to answer patient questions accurately and thoughtfully is critical and will further enhance the patient experience.

2. Research the Options

Conduct careful and thorough research of potential retail partners, their products and their current relationships with other offices. Once you've decided on a specific type of product, take note of how many retailers offer that product and what types of products are typically offered in parallel. When choosing a vendor, prioritize product quality and partnership satisfaction. Product quality is crucial. What you offer patients in your office will reflect on the overall quality of your services, and your goal is to offer the best patient experience possible. Equally as important is partnership satisfaction. How easy is the vendor to work with? How frequently are they willing to deliver and replenish inventory? What are the potential mark-ups on each product? Is there any opportunity to grow with the vendor and expand as demand increases? What educational support do they offer? Are there minimum quantities? Do they buy back? These are key details to know in advance of making any binding commitments with potential vendors. The vendor you choose should have a strong record of sales, customer reviews and partner relationships.

3. Evaluate the Numbers

Once you've identified a few vendors, you'll want to dig deeper into the numbers. What types of products offer the highest profitability in the medical aesthetics office market? What products offer patients the best outcomes both in combination and stand alone. What are the profit margins for some of the key products in each retail line you've targeted? What is a typical quarterly ROI? While some of these numbers are relatively straightforward to calculate, others may be more difficult to pinpoint and will require



Image by Olha Kozachenko at Adobe Stock

careful research. A key part of your investigation should be based on patient satisfaction. After all, even if profitability on a product is historically high, you must first sell the product to make a profit.

Research how well customers respond to specific products offered by each vendor and calculate an estimate of overall satisfaction. It may also be beneficial to reach out to other medical aesthetics offices that offer specific products and request a rough estimate of patient satisfaction. What percentage of patients who buy this product review it positively? Would they recommend it to a friend or colleague? How many times have they purchased the product over the last year? How many products does a patient purchase on average? Some of these numbers may be provided by the vendor themselves, particularly if they are a more established entity. Though careful research takes time, it will be worth your investment to evaluate potential vendors by the numbers before making a commitment.

4. Manage Your Relationship with Vendors

Once you've identified the vendors you want to work with, your next step is to establish and maintain a healthy relationship with this business partner. First, make sure any contractual agreements signed are mutually beneficial. In most cases they will be because you have parallel goals—to satisfy patients and sell products. Because product prices can fluctuate with the market, you may want to request written confirmation that the price will not fluctuate more than a maximum allowable percentage, based on your evaluation of profitability. The most important part of managing your relationship with vendors is to maintain transparency. Pass along feedback on their products from your patients, whether it be positive or negative. They may be able to expand a specific line or improve upon existing products to better satisfy patients in your office. The goal is to grow together. If your sales program is performing exceedingly well, they will be able to learn from you. If your sales have become stagnant, they may be able to offer tips on how to boost your marketing program and may even provide literature or product demonstrations to increase your success with the product. Seek to establish and maintain a positive, honest and mutually beneficial relationship with your vendor.





Integrate products into patient treatment plans or pre-op and post-op care.

5. Integrate Products Into Your Treatment Plans

Aside from product quality and vendor relations, the most important part of a successful retail program is how well you integrate product lines into your treatment plans and services. The products you have chosen to sell should not stand alone in the back corner of your waiting area. Spotlight the products by featuring them in personalized treatment plans and monthly specials.

Did you know the amount spent on skin care is three times more than that spent on services or procedures? Every procedure should have a product and additional procedures to augment. With this revenue strategy, retail should be 20% of your total revenue.

- **Example A:** Clear & Brilliant ($500) + Retinal & Antioxidant ($200) and post-op Hydrafacial, $250 = $950
  -90% increase in revenue
- **Example B:** Micro Needling Treatment ($450) + Serum and Accelerator ($280) = post-op Hydrafacial ($250) = $980
  -118% increase in revenue
- **Example C:** Full Facelift ($20,000) + Laser Resurfacing pre-op ($1,500) + Retinol and Antioxidant ($200) and post-op Vascular laser ($75) and Hydrafacial ($250) = $22,025
  -More than 10% Increase in revenue

From top: Image by JackF; Olha Kozachenko at Adobe Stock

When patients have their skin care built into their treatment plan, they will:

- Use the best products for their skin that you know will yield the best possible outcomes.
- Be more likely to practice home care compliance.
- Experience increased convenience as they can purchase them at the same time as they book their treatment/procedure or follow up appointments.
- Be excited to experience something new.

When providers build skin care and or other treatment modalities into their treatment plan or pre-op and post-op care, they will experience these benefits:

- **Volume.** Comprehensive treatment packages increase sales.
- **Margins.** Comprehensive treatment packages can lower the cost of goods sold and increase your profit margins.
- **Exposure.** Comprehensive treatment packages offer new opportunities and exposure to additional treatments.

According to a recent survey by the *New York Post*, the average female consumer spends $313 per month on products for her face and men spend $244. The survey states that 82% of men are now using skin care. If even 20 patients spent that on products you recommend versus buying over-the-counter products, that would be an extra $6,260 per month of revenue generated by women and $4,880 for men.



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Ensure staff are well-trained in your different products and how each are integrated into specific treatment plans and services.

Let's take a little deeper dive into patient expectations versus reality.

- 86% of patients expect physicians to recommend a pre-treatment skin care regimen, yet only 14% of patients were recommended at-home care.
- 91% of patients expect physicians to recommend a post-care skin care regimen, yet only 30% of patients were prescribed post-care products.

So, you can see the clear gaps in the industry and how comprehensive treatment plans can increase your revenue opportunities and create better results for your patients.

6. Train Your Staff

The success of your retail program is directly proportional to how well your staff is trained. It is critical that every member of your staff listens to and engages your patient population. They should be intimately familiar with the personalized treatment plans and services you offer. When you launch a retail program, invest in staff training. A well-trained staff will have a thorough understanding of your products, how they will be incorporated into your treatment plans and how they compare to similar products on the market. The goal is to inform your staff so they can inform your patients. When a patient asks about a specific product, they should receive a well-informed, positive response. Not only will this help to increase trust in your staff, but it will also boost sales and lead to increased profitability.

7. Keep an Eye on the Numbers

Once you've built a retail program, you'll want to review the numbers at least once a quarter. Calculate your overall ROI on retail sales and determine which products have the highest sales and profitability rates. Also take note of which products patients purchase more than once. The most expensive products do not always offer the highest profit margins. Use this data to tailor your marketing program and staff training, if needed. ME



Terri Ross is a world-renowned practice management expert, thought leader, and international speaker in the medical aesthetic industry. She founded APX Platform in 2021. In 2023 after only two years post-launch, APX merged with Engage Technologies Group to offer a complete practice performance system, encompassing practice optimization and patient engagement. Terri now serves as President of Aesthetics at Engage Technologies Group.

The French Connection:
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endermologie® is a proprietary technique that is widely used in combination with medical aesthetics and surgical procedures to relaunch cellular activity before and after procedures.

"To date, the LPG® portfolio of technologies are still 100% made in France. With over 165 clinical studies to date, and 187 patents registered around the world, we have met and exceeded the needs of today's modern providers and their patients with the development of safe, innovative, and versatile technology that addresses what patients are seeking today," says Michel Perdiguero, General Manager, LPG® America.

endermologie® continues to be a very popular treatment for plastic surgeons, dermatologists, aesthetic practices and medical spas around the world to offer their clients and patients. Sofie Libessart, owner of Clinique Libessart in Miami, FL, has had a long and prosperous experience with LPG® technology. "I have been practicing endermologie® since the introduction of the first LPG® machine in the U.S. and have remained loyal to this treatment ever since. Over the years, I have consistently upgraded our equipment to include the latest innovations. Currently, I use the most recent model Cellu M6 Alliance® which delivers superior results and is easy to operate for practitioners. This ongoing evolution makes it a staple of our medspa offerings that meets and exceeds the expectations of our clients for effective and comfortable treatments."



She continues, "endermologie® continues to be a very popular treatment among my clients seeking non-invasive solutions for body sculpting and skin toning. From my experience, it consistently delivers positive outcomes, notably improving skin texture and reducing the appearance of cellulite. It seamlessly integrates into the service offerings of medspas because it complements other aesthetic treatments and caters to the growing demand for minimal downtime procedures. This therapy not only enhances body contours but also significantly boosts client satisfaction and loyalty by providing visible, tangible results."

The Contour Room™ features three locations in Sherman Oaks, Los Angeles and Agoura Hills, California. Partners Aleksandra Turlure and Rola Titizian have been long proponents of the value of endermologie® systems for their clients.

"We receive so many heartwarming testimonials from out cherished clients who share their positive experiences with our treatments. It is very rewarding to be able to deliver results that make a difference for them."

- *"After each session, I feel lighter and rejuvenated. The lymphatic drainage has been incredibly beneficial for my overall well-being."*
- *"I've seen a significant reduction in cellulite and dimpling on my legs, which has greatly boosted my confidence."*
- *"These treatments have helped me slim down and feel more comfortable in my body, particularly during pre- and post-menopausal changes."*

"These results reflect the satisfaction and happiness of our clients following their treatments with endermologie®. It is immensely gratifying to witness the positive impact we're making on their lives," she says.



After over three decades of expertise and scientific research, LPG® has created a new patent to control all these natural mechanisms in a single treatment. Our newest innovation features treatment heads designed to send signals to the cells to deliver unprecedented results.

According to New York City plastic surgeon Kevin Tehrani, M.D., "I identified an unmet need in my practice for patients who are seeking a versatile and comfortable treatment that offers a wide range of benefits without side effects, downtime or damage to their skin. When I learned about LPG® America's Cellu M6 Alliance® system, I recognized the potential benefits and results we could offer our aesthetic patients."

Acting simultaneously to release localized fat and improve skin quality, the new LPG® patented roller and motorized flap acts directly on the adipocytes present in our hypodermis and on the fibroblasts in our dermis. This 360° treatment stimulates cells to help fibroblasts boost collagen production, elastin, and hyaluronic acid, which are naturally present in our skin.

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WHY PATIENT PERCEPTION OF BOARD CERTIFICATION MATTERS

What do your patients think when they see the term “board-certified?” Do they understand its implications? Do they even care?

by Tony Scianna

British journalist and classical music aficionado Norman Lebrecht once proclaimed that classical music should embrace its elitism. During his infamous talk, “Reframing the Classic Music Experience,” he explored the perceived elitism that lingers in the classical music industry.

“Why shouldn’t we be elitist?” he asked.

He argued that a lifetime of work from some of the finest talents on earth should be a selective and elite experience that is celebrated. He viewed the ideal classical performance as long pieces of music, expensive tickets and sophisticated audiences. Elitism and secrecy can share the same air when traditional views on how things should be done develop a stranglehold over innovative and nonconformal thinking.

Of course, this concept spreads beyond classical music to any medium that encourages intellect, competition and profit, including plastic surgery. Cosmetic surgeons devote their professional lives to elective procedures with an established notion of patient dissatisfaction, and therefore, risk to reputation and livelihood, unlike any other field of surgery.

Richard C. Webster, M.D., a historic practitioner of cosmetic surgery, wrote in a 1984 article on the history of cosmetic surgery, "The more elective a surgery is, the less tolerance of error or inadequate improvement there will be…when patients must pay themselves for their treatment, every item of expense is scrutinized carefully and, at times, rationalized into being unjustified."[1]

When surgery is performed to eradicate disease, preserve life or diminish physical pain, its medical value is indisputable. The need for the procedure typically originates from an unpredictable circumstance, and in many cases, the patient is only accepting the surgery because of its necessity.

The uniqueness of cosmetic surgery is in the subjectivity of its results. That subjectivity is why third parties, like insurance companies, can choose to value cosmetic surgery differently than general surgery. The discussion is more about individual patient desires than medical necessity.

OBTUSE OPPOSITION

While in its infancy, the plastic surgery discipline was openly opposed by the medical community at large. The need for reconstructive surgery facilitated the creation of the specialty, but since the field of plastic surgery involved utilizing techniques that, for the most part, already existed in other previously established surgical specialties, the growth of the plastic surgery industry was seen as coming at the expense of those original disciplines.

According to Dr. Webster, those interested in cosmetic procedures were considered everything from "tinkerers, watchmakers and panderers to the rich" to "dollar-hungry incompetents who would not know what to do in a belly, who could not operate their way out of a box in 'necessary' surgery and who, at times, were nothing more than quacks or outright charlatans preying on a gullible public."





Board certification serves as a stamp of appoval for surgeons.

"Nobody believed plastic surgery should exist," said Alex Sobel, D.O., FAACS, current president of the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery (AACS) and past president of the American Board of Cosmetic Surgery (ABCS), as well as the owner of Anderson Civil Cosmetic Surgery. "They had to battle so hard for their own existence that they would hide their interests from peers for fear of ridicule or getting run out of a hospital."

The need to work in the shadows led to a pattern of anti-collaborative behavior and jealousy among peers that is commonly associated with the medical industry. "Your tricks were your ability to differentiate yourself from somebody else, and if you could execute a great facelift that no one else in town could, then you had all the business," Dr. Sobel said.

As medicine progressed and specialties emerged, disagreements about who should or should not perform a procedure became commonplace. Doctors began to protect their own turf.

"An internal medicine doctor may develop and then insert the first several thousand pacemakers," Sobel said. "Then suddenly a few years later, when there's a specialty called cardiology that didn't exist beforehand, they say internal medicine doctors shouldn't be putting in pacemakers – and that's how the medical community kind of is."

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Cut-throat competition might be less prevalent today, but the philosophy that doctors should be placed in "board-certified boxes" persists and often grows within certain segments of the medical community, including cosmetic surgery. Sobel provided an example from his time as an Ear, Nose & Throat (ENT) surgeon. He was testifying in front of the Medical Board of California on why cosmetic surgeons should be able to advertise what they do when a surgeon tried to dismiss his credibility by saying that ENTs have no training outside of the face.

"ENT surgeons invented most of the microvascular free flap (techniques) where you can take off part of somebody's leg, plug it in somewhere in the face and reconstruct the jawbone out of it," Sobel said. "Nobody had a problem with ENTs inventing that, and for a while, they let ENTs perform it. That's a huge reconstructive industry that was brought to the public and eventually brought to plastic surgery by ENTs who had a need for it."

THE BENEFITS OF BOARD CERTIFICATION

As Dr. Sobel pointed out, only those trained and experienced in certain procedures should be allowed to perform those procedures. All doctors take an oath to only do what lies within their education, experience and training. There is a need for terms like board certification to ensure public perception of expertise.

"You want to be board-certified because that's your stamp of approval from the medical education system that you've accomplished your specialty and you now have a right to practice," Sobel said. "That gets a little dangerous when doctors say, 'Well, I'm entitled to practice within the scope, even the parts that I'm not really trained or accomplished in. And since I took a test, nobody can really argue with me.' Not everybody does that."

Sobel described how doctors can lean on certification titles to either restrict competition or expand their capabilities. Board certification does not implicitly imply extensive experience and training in all elements of a specific surgical discipline.

"Physicians could tell patients, 'You should come to me because I'm board-certified and that means I have the gold standard to do what you need done. You are at peril if you go see someone else,'" Sobel said. "I think, from the inside, that's what physicians think, from their training to whatever they ended up doing, that's how they see board certification and how they want the public to see board certification."



Do patients care about the specifics of a surgeon's training?

Hospitals can benefit from using terms like board certification to bolster the credibility of their staff and potentially shift any medical malpractice blame to the certification board. State governments can also use certification as a catch-all term to allow doctors to work in different states.

"States have a lot of interest in board certification because they want to be able to credential people for working and moving from one state to another quickly," Sobel said. "When they were figuring that all out, one of the basic standards was board certification, because it's just such an easy commodity."

Sobel suggested the purposeful vagueness of the term board certification offers patients a simplified explanation, because ultimately, they don't care about the specifics. They just want someone who will properly perform their surgery. But does board certification prove that a surgeon is safe or just well-trained?

"It's a discussion of the scope of practice for mid-level practitioners, physician associates, nurse practitioners who

Clockwise from top: Image by Aram; Svitlana at Adobe Stock

present themselves as doctors and others," Sobel said. "Is it commercial free speech or is it confusing to the public and harmful? If you actually drilled somebody on it from the medical community and asked, 'Does (being board-certified) really mean they're safe,' they would say, 'Well, no, not really, but it means the doctor got far enough to take a test.'"

PUBLIC DEFINITIONS OF PLASTIC & COSMETIC SURGERY

A 2017 study[2] in the *Journal of Plastic Reconstructive Surgery* by Ajul Shah, M.D., et al., tried to better determine public opinions on titles like plastic surgeon and cosmetic surgeon and whether patients feel confused when searching for providers of cosmetic surgery.

For the study, researchers analyzed responses to a 19-question survey from 5,135 patients. Predictably, patients believed surgeons needed extensive training to perform surgery to improve cosmetic appearance, with 77% of respondents suggesting at least five years of training. In reality, it takes 10 to 14 years on average to become a doctor or a surgeon in the United States. When broken down into its different components, this includes a four-year undergraduate degree, four years of medical school and three to seven years of residency.[3]

Residency length can be dependent on the surgical discipline and typically involves five years of general surgery residency, plus integrated experience in the specific discipline. Plastic surgery includes two to three years of residency/fellowship in plastic surgery, while dermatology includes three years plus the PGY-1 Transitional/Preliminary program and cosmetic surgery requires four to six years of residency in a related discipline and one-year fellowship.[4]



It takes 10 to 14 years on average to become a doctor or surgeon in the U.S.

The survey found that 87% of respondents either thought surgeons must be appropriately credentialed to legally advertise themselves or were unsure if they needed to be. Only 10% of respondents said board certification was not important if the surgeon had a good reputation. A significant number of respondents were uncomfortable with obstetrician-gynecologists (92%), dermatologists (68%), general surgeons (74%) and family practice physicians (93%) performing surgery to improve their appearance.

Another takeaway from the survey was the apparent confusion among patients on the differences between plastic surgery and cosmetic surgery. A small percentage of patients (6%) believed that board certification in cosmetic surgery required more training than plastic surgery, while 29% believed that plastic surgery required more training and 11% thought cosmetic surgeons and plastic surgeons had equal training. Most respondents (54%) answered by saying they were unsure of the difference.

Board certification from the American Board of Cosmetic Surgery requires spending a full year training exclusively and comprehensively in cosmetic surgery, passing a two-day oral and written exam and completing a minimum of 300 individual cosmetic surgery procedures of the face, breast and body, as well as additional training in non-surgical cosmetic procedures.[5]



From top: Image by Rene La/peopleimages.com; Aram at Adobe Stock



Certification from the ABCS and ASPS requires additional training in cosmetic and plastic surgery and passing exams.

American Society of Plastic Surgery members need to have board certification from the American Board of Plastic Surgery, or if practicing in Canada, certification by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. They also must pass oral and written exams and complete continuing medical education (CME) requirements annually.[6]

THE ENGAGED MODERN PATIENT

According to Dr. Webster's 1984 article, the original distinction between plastic and cosmetic surgery was that plastic surgery was focused on reconstruction and cosmetic surgery was done solely to improve one's appearance for cosmetic reasons. Dr. Sobel suggested that in modern medicine, the terms are essentially interchangeable. There is less of a stigma about a desire to improve one's appearance for purely cosmetic reasons, which has perhaps created a lack of public distinction between the surgeries.

The 2017 study indicates that patients do care about the phrase "board-certified," they just don't know what it means due to medical marketing, recognized and unrecognized boards and varying categorizations of surgeons. The authors of the study concluded, "This confusion makes it increasingly difficult for a patient to interpret the necessary information to decide which physician can safely perform surgery to improve one's appearance."[2]

More information is needed to truly understand how much patients want to know or should know, about their surgeons. The biggest concern of patients is likely always going to be their own safety, and the term "board-certified" next to their surgeon's name can create the seal of approval they need to agree to the procedure.

While Dr. Sobel believes that ultimately patients want some kind of reassurance of the credibility of their doctors, he also thinks there is a desire for some to go deeper with their level of understanding.

"So much of what we do, the way we practice and the way these certifying boards function, is in the absence of public opinion," Sobel said. "I think most of us can agree that modern medical care involves an informed or pseudo-informed public that seeks their own information, their own diagnosis and their own treatments. They are asking more questions and becoming more engaged." ME

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Tony Scianna is the associate editor of *MedEsthetics.*

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THERMAGE FLX:
THE SKIN-TIGHTENING LEADER

With Anne Chapas, MD and Jeffery S. Dover, MD FRCPC

Solta Medical's Thermage FLX System, a non-invasive radiofrequency (RF) treatment, is FDA cleared for smoothing skin on the face, eyes, and body for an overall younger-looking appearance—and is the only skin tightening device FDA cleared to treat the eyelids.

The monopolar radiofrequency (RF) device features an optimized energy delivery algorithm, AccuREP™ technology, that automatically measures and precisely tunes the amount of energy delivered to the patient and treatment area. This fourth-generation device also features a vibrating handpiece to help enhance patient comfort. A larger treatment tip reduces treatment time by 25 percent over its predecessors. Thermage FLX has broad application and can be used on all skin types any time of year, making it a workhorse for busy aesthetic practices.

Jeffrey S. Dover, MD, FRCPC says the Thermage FLX is his go-to device for skin tightening at his practice, Skincare Physicians in Chestnut Hill, MA. His practice treats patients with the device several times a day, most days of the week.

"The FLX device is effective and has a demonstrated safety profile for skin tightening all over the body. We perform treatments to multiple areas, such as the entire face and the eyelids, on the same day," he explains.

Anne Chapas, MD, also a long-time Thermage user, says it is used frequently in her UnionDerm practice. "What's nice about the Thermage FLX system is that it is designed to tighten skin on the whole body. It's the only device that's FDA cleared for treatment of skin on the eyelids, which is one of the unique treatments that we offer and which we do at least a couple times a week," she says. "It also has a larger footprint for treating skin on the body, which is a big request in the Northeast, especially in the middle of the summer."

HIGH PATIENT SATISFACTION

For most patients, results gradually appear in the 3 to 6 months following a single treatment, although some patients may notice immediate results and continued improvement over time. The longevity of the results depends on each individual's skin condition, sun exposure, and aging process, but Dr. Chapas notes that, typically, patients repeat treatment anywhere from 1 to 2 years.

In Dr. Dover's experience, more than 90% of well selected patients get pleasing results and are very satisfied.

While patients may experience some discomfort during the procedure, he says it is tolerated by most patients with no topical anesthesia or peri or post-treatment pain management. "Discomfort is typically fleeting and resolves shortly after treatment," he adds.

One major benefit of the device is that it's colorblind and does not disrupt the surface of the skin, so it can be used on all skin types all year round, Dr. Chapas adds. As a dermatologist, she recommends her patients stay out of the sun, but notes that it's okay to treat patients who may be going on vacation or right back to work. Unlike certain resurfacing procedures, there is no strict requirement to avoid sun exposure after FLX treatment. Post-treatment, most patients can use their normal skincare, put on makeup, and go right back to their usual activities.

A GREAT ADDITION FOR ANY PRACTICE

For any practice considering adding skin tightening, Dr. Chapas and Dr. Dover agree that Thermage FLX would be a great choice.

"Given that the procedure can be delegated to expert support staff and the fee per treatment is repeatedly high, Thermage FLX is a very high yield device and procedure," says Dr. Dover, describing the FLX as innovative technology that is "a stalwart" in his practice.

"Thermage FLX has a lot of histological evidence as far as how it works and how safe it is. It's used around the world and has a lot of demand for that reason," Dr. Chapas says.

Plus, it's comfortable for the provider. The system offers a light handpiece, a foot pedal, and increased treatment tip size for faster treatments, Dr. Chapas says.

In addition, Solta's customer service and support is excellent. The company's Senior Account Specialists work with practices after they've purchased the device for ensured support and training.

"Solta was one of the first companies to come out with a consumable tip model for devices. This keeps the company invested in your practice because they continue to earn revenue with the more treatments you do and the more tips you buy. I think our incentives are aligned in that the company wants you to use their product and be successful, and so they provide a lot of support," Dr. Chapas explains. "Solta is also launching a direct-to-consumer campaign for Thermage, which involves a social media campaign, a print marketing campaign, and a television campaign. I think that brand recognition is going to get even stronger and it's always easier to do a consult with a patient who already comes in knowing about the procedure and is interested in getting it."

Disclosure: Dr. Chapas and Dr. Dover are both paid consultants for Solta Medical.

Combatting the Commodification of Medical Aesthetics

Saami Khalifian, M.D., Emphasizes Medical Precision & Prioritizing Patient Mental Health in Aesthetics.

Written by Rebecca Lane



Saami Khalifian, M.D.

Sammi Khalifian, M.D., started his medical career studying an area of medicine that is about as different from medical aesthetics as you can get, the field of neurosurgery. “My father had a traumatic brain injury and I went to medical school really to do neurosurgery. I went to Hopkins because that was like the mecca of neurosurgery,” he says. “I very quickly became disillusioned with neurosurgery because I felt that even the best of outcomes were not great outcomes and it kind of was hitting very close to home. But for the last decade, my identity was very much a surgeon. So, now having gotten to Baltimore from Southern California, I was like, what the hell am I going to do now?”

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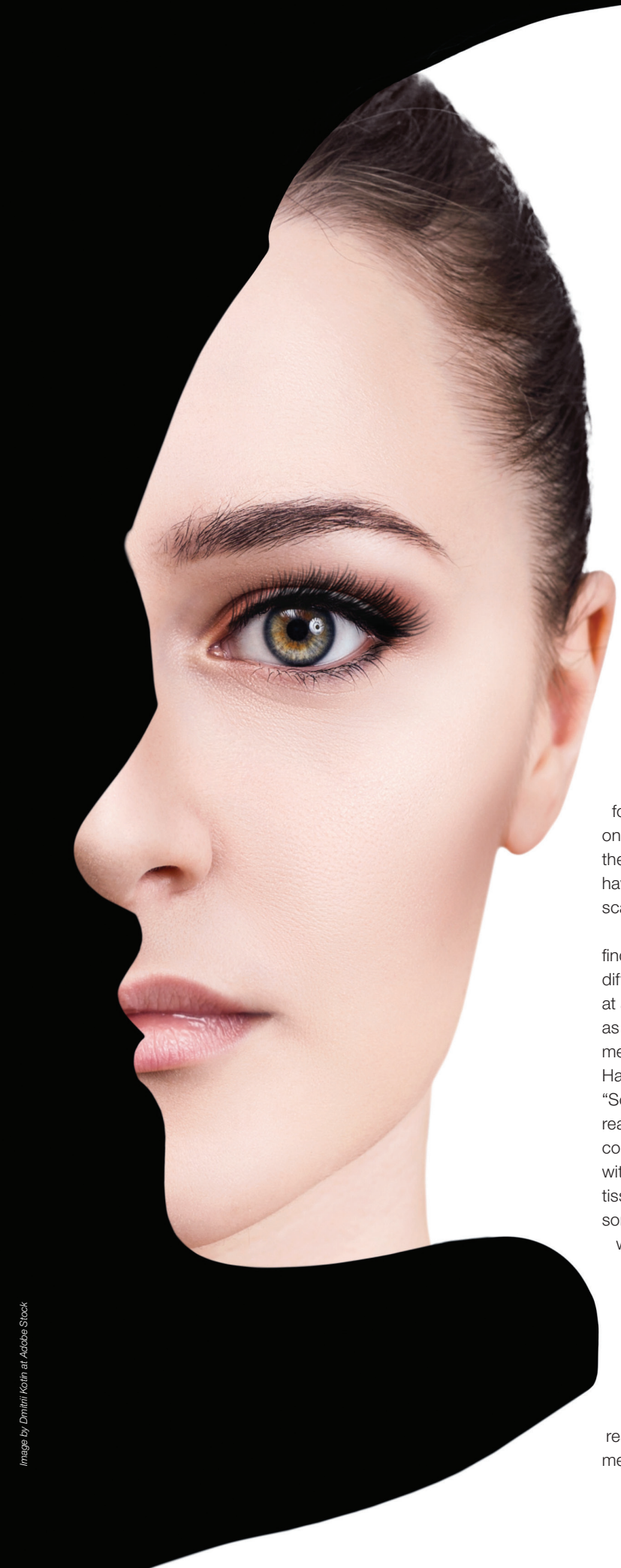

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It was after attending an intriguing lecture given by the plastic surgeon running the face transplant program at Johns Hopkins that Dr. Khalifian's interest in medical aesthetics was first ignited. He was invited to work in this surgeon's laboratory devoted to facial transplantation, as well as related work in upper extremity transplantation, with Dr. Khalifian focusing on immunology in relation to transplantation success. Discovering that the skin was the tissue most likely to reject transplant, his primary focus became skin immunology. However, Dr. Khalifian once again found himself disillusioned by the realization that the field of facial transplantation was not one that would have the far-reaching positive impact on a larger patient scale he sought in his career.

As residency applications loomed close, the pressure to find a field that would allow him to utilize a combination of his different medical passions to help patients left Dr. Khalifian at a loss until he considered the possibility of dermatology as the answer to his dilemma. Thus, after earning his medical degree from Johns Hopkins in 2015, he went to Harvard University to embark on his dermatology residency. "So I applied to dermatology, I got in and then I started to really enjoy aesthetics. I initially started doing aesthetics in connective tissue disease patients, working in conjunction with rheumatology and dermatology to create a connective tissue disease cosmetic clinic and I really liked it. That was sort of where it all began. Now I have my own practice and we focus on aesthetics, but also do medicine and surgery as well. We read slides, so we're doing pathology; we have clinical trials units, so we're doing research; we have a training center, so we do teaching, etc. So that really allowed me to check all the boxes of what interested me. I have a lot of varied interests and I don't want to forgo one to pursue another. And so through dermatology, I found that I actually was able to really push on all the fronts without compromising or being mediocre at one or the other."



Having patients use the language of feelings to explain their concerns, helps doctors better pinpoint what areas to treat to address those specific aesthetic concerns.

Medical Precision in Aesthetics: Diagnosis & the Language of Feelings

Despite having chosen to enter the field of medical aesthetics, Dr. Khalifian still approaches treatment and thus, patient consultations, with an emphasis on medical precision, starting with the diagnosis. When it comes to diagnosing the aesthetic concerns to ascertain the appropriate anatomical areas and treatment, this involves prioritizing patients' emotional and mental health when approaching the subject of appearance-related concerns.

Dr. Khalifian states, "There's basically two things that happen when you ask patients how they feel. When I invite someone to tell me how they feel about the way they look, they may say I see this or I see that, pointing to a fold or a crease. I'll sort of redirect them, and say, 'Ok, how do you feel?' I really try and get at what the feeling that they're experiencing is. Sometimes it may take a couple rounds of redirection until they're like, 'oh, you're asking me about how I actually feel about this,' because I think no one's ever asked them this question. The other thing that will sometimes happen is they'll say, 'I don't know doc, just tell me what you think.' I very much avoid this, only because if you can't see it, I don't want you to see it. You don't want me to tell you what to see. Once you see it, you can't unsee it. So, I very much push back on this, and I won't answer that question."

A crucial element of this is understanding what kind of language patients have at their disposal that will best facilitate their ability to communicate their aesthetic concerns. Dr. Khalifian recognizes that while patients may mistakenly try to use medical terminology related to aesthetics to explain their aesthetic concerns, this is not language they understand well enough to adequately communicate their concerns. Instead, he encourages the use of language patients do have familiarity with that can communicate their concerns to a medical practitioner, the language of feelings.

"No one woke up today and said, 'Let me go to Dr. Saami's chair and let him tear my face apart,' right. They saw something that brought them in. They just may not have the language to tell me, and it's because they're thinking that they need to use language like medical jargon that they don't have. They don't have the language to translate what they are feeling into what can be done. This is why I use feelings because they definitely have that language. I just try to invite people to tell me how they feel. Then this leads me in the right direction and the feeling allows me to cue into the part of the face where they are seeing these issues they want to be treated. If you're feeling angry or tired, angry and tired is up here in the eyes. If you're feeling sad, or like you look sad, sad is usually around the mouth. It's worked for me and I think it also builds report," explains Dr. Khalifian.

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Commodification of Aesthetics: Impact on Medical Precision

One of the challenges Dr. Khalifian has observed as an aesthetic practitioner is the lack of respect for the doctor/patient relationship. He says, "Aesthetic medicine is still medicine and still requires precision. When you go to a cardiologist, does he say, 'I'm going to give you a sprinkle of statin and a sprinkle of beta blockers?' No, they would give you 20 mg of this and 10 mg of that. It should be no different in aesthetics. There should be precision and when diagnosing, you're visually assessing the patient's face, so you can choose the right product and perhaps even the right dilution of said product. So, I need to understand when I'm seeing this fold, skin laxity, etc., if it is caused by a bony, muscle, fascia, skin or other anatomical issue. Because I'm first diagnosing the issue, I'm able to choose the right product. It all starts with the diagnosis; diagnosis in treatment but also diagnosis in management of complications."

This disconnect in the medical aesthetics industry between the medical expertise and role of the doctor and the patient's perception of that role compared to the perception of traditional doctor/patient relationships creates numerous problems when it comes to the aesthetic practitioner's ability to provide optimal treatment to said patients.

> *"Aesthetic medicine is still medicine and still requires precision... Because I'm first diagnosing the issue, I'm able to choose the right product. It all starts with the diagnosis; diagnosis in treatment but also diagnosis in management of complications."*

"This taps into this idea of the value proposition and trust. When you go to an aesthetic provider, they may give you some recommendation and let's say it is some full face correction. You may say, 'well, I don't want to do this, I want to do that.' Much like going to that cardiologist, you don't go to the cardiologist and have him say you need four stents and a coronary artery bypass surgery and you say, 'no, I'm just going to take a statin.' No one does that. Somewhere along the lines in this journey of commodification that I was alluding to, it became seemingly appropriate to do that, but even in aesthetics, you don't get one breast implant. It's challenging, particularly with injectables, because getting a complete result sometimes does require you to do higher numbers of units, multimodal treatment or more syringes, and patients are not amenable to that. This is where for me, it's been challenging to build out both trust and the value proposition. They may trust you, but the value proposition is either not there or it's just out of range," states Dr. Khalifian.

One of the biggest ways Dr. Khalifian sees this resulting in issues for aesthetic practitioners is that it hinders doctors' ability to provide optimal treatment for patient concerns. He explains, "I think one of the issues that I also see is we don't want to dilute the results that you can create, but you also don't want to not be able to treat your patients. So, there's a balance and it's hard to sometimes achieve that balance based on budgets, or outcome expectations, timelines, downtime acceptance, etc. Some of the coolest things I can do require significant downtime, but what I've learned recently is that downtime is perhaps the thing that keeps people away the most. While I can do a crazy good CO2 or full-field erbium laser resurfacing and take 15 years off someone's face, they have to give me a month of downtime, and they're just not going to do that. So, they'll take a fractionated approach, and maybe I'll take four or five years off their face, but that's more acceptable to them even if it costs more than giving me that kind of downtime."

These challenges faced by medical aesthetics practitioners are partially due to the remaining stigma around the field, both among consumers as well as academia. "This is very commonplace. I think even in medical school and residency there is a habit of dissuading medical students from going into aesthetics. Even in dermatology residency programs there is a screening to determine if you are just doing this because you want to go into aesthetics. So, there is this very strong push back on aesthetics from academia and so you see it outside of academia as well," shares Dr. Khalifian.

Commodification of Aesthetics: Trends & Misunderstood Treatments

The stigma that has surrounded medical aesthetics and its perception in relation to the field of medicine as a whole has resulted in the commodification of aesthetics. This commodification of a profession that is still medical in nature downplays and pulls attention from the importance of approaching aesthetics with a medical and scientific mindset to optimize results and patient care and safety. Dr. Khalifian points out the impact this has had on recent aesthetic treatment trends.

"There are also trends now that are very much fads that people employ because they want to, without really understanding what they're doing and why. Someone popularizes a treatment, and it becomes the new fad. Traptox was one of them and I think, 'you know, why? What is the benefit here?' I think that what people don't understand is when it's done improperly, you get off-target pain in your neck or your scapula. Keep in mind that in the United States the majority of injectors are non-physicians. Most of the people offering this treatment, even if they are physicians, their understanding of the trapezii is probably not the same as their understanding of the glabella. So, I find that these types of misunderstood treatments tend to just be just fads."

One of these treatment trends Dr. Khalifian has found to be misunderstood by both patients and aesthetic providers is masseter botox. He says, "Masseter botox is very misunderstood by most providers. I've been looking at the masseter treatment for probably five years now. It all began when I started doing masseters and I noticed it involved putting a lot of units in very small areas right next to each other. If you happen to hit the rhizorius muscle, you're going to create a smile asymmetry. The other thing was you would see an accentuation of people's discomfort in the joint afterwards, when in reality a lot of patients were getting this treatment to alleviate discomfort, bruxism and TMJ disorder."

Once he recognized the problems inherent in the established masseter botox treatment technique, Dr. Khalifian turned to his knowledge of anatomy and physiology to develop an effective injection technique that addresses these issues. "Think about temporal mandibular joint disorder (TMJ) - where is the joint? The joint is up in the superior aspect of the masseter. However, where do I would say 98% of people inject the masseter? They do three points down the jawline, but the joint is up here, and the masseter muscle stretches from the zygoma to the mandible, posteriorly from the gluteal angle and anteriorly to the notch. It's this massive, thick muscle, so if I only inject



Dr. Khalifian developed a technique for the widely misunderstood masseter botox trend that achieves a global treatment of the masseter, which is necessary to truly treat TMJ disorder.

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the inferior portion of the masseter, what it does is cause the upper pole of the masseter to compensate and work harder, which is going to make it worse. True TMJ disorder treatment requires a global treatment of the masseter, from superior to inferior, lateral to medial, etc. In this manner, you can use less units than what people realize, only using one to two units in each injection site, working from deep to superficial because you want to get the whole thickness. Most people don't inject that way. So even with masseter botox, there's a misunderstanding of what we're doing and what message we're giving patients, but most people don't know that," he explains.

Commodification Vs. Medical Precision in Aesthetics: Pushing Boundaries

Dr. Khalifian emphasizes the need for aesthetic practitioners to push boundaries and question why a certain treatment technique is used and if there is a better way it could be done. Practitioners need to challenge themselves to improve and evolve aesthetic treatments and techniques through understanding the science and medicine behind them. Rather than accept the current technique used for certain treatments whether it is the most effective method or not, practitioners can use their medical expertise to advance aesthetics.

He states, "One of the things that I always ask is why? Why are we doing these things the way that we're doing them? If someone can give me a well thought out answer and reason as to why they do it a certain way, great. What we often hear is, 'I do it this way because this is the way I was taught.' If you ask why they were taught that way, the answer you get is, 'I don't know, that's just the way I was taught.' That's just not good enough. This is when you go back to anatomy and physiology to understand why you would do it this way instead of another. That's science and medicine; it's trying to understand the mechanisms of what we're doing because medicine is still medicine. It's this idea that we should be pushing forward the boundaries and understanding what we're doing."

Despite needing certain improvements in this respect, Dr. Khalifian also calls attention to the boundaries that are being pushed forward thanks to positive trends in aesthetics that are bringing awareness to diversity and the needs of patients that have been underrepresented in the past, such as the transgender community.

"It's even things like blurring the lines of what is masculine and feminine, right? It's understanding that just because idealized versions of male and female beauty may be something that previously was suggestible, masculinization and feminization is as much a subjective issue and personal issue as it is some idealized form of what beauty means. A square jaw in a woman may be desirable or softer features in a man may be desirable," says Dr. Khalifian. He gives the example, "When jawline filler in United States started to become more commonplace, what we saw was a lot more square jaws, which previously would have been very masculine and thought of as not appropriate in women, but a lot of women are specifically asking for that. When you look across different anthropomorphic cultures and genders across the world, one of the things that you'll see, particularly in Eastern European women, is they have a squarer jaw compared to Asian cultures, which have more rounded lower faces. This is purely a reflection of other aesthetic trends. What's hot today may not be hot tomorrow, but I think our job as providers is to really understand what patients are after, what's motivating them and why and whether that aligns with our own goals, values and abilities to create those kinds of outcomes."



Practitioners are stewards of the public trust, and earn that trust by guiding patients through their aesthetic journey while prioritizing their mental and physical well-being.

Combatting Commodification: Prioritizing Patient Mental Health in Aesthetics

At the end of the day, it's about prioritizing patients' mental health. Dr. Khalifian explains, "We are the stewards of the public trust. You're coming to me because you're trusting in me to create an outcome in you and that I have some knowledge base to help guide you on your journey. Hopefully I don't take this lightly and recognize that we're this close to

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W.A.I.T. and listen to avoid drawing attention to imperfections patients aren't aware of and address their specific aesthetic concerns.

pushing people into body dysmorphia, so I'm not doing that to people. For instance, not pointing out to them things that they didn't ask for or see in the beginning. If you came and you asked for tear trough filler, I may say, 'Well, your midface and upper face, your temples and cheeks, they are related to what's happening here.' That's germane to that discussion. But, if you didn't ask about your lips, jowls and neck, why would I bring those up when they don't pertain to that?"

Vulnerability and empathy are vital to earning patient trust and creating a safe space in which patients can feel comfortable expressing their own vulnerability. Considering the vulnerable nature of sharing appearance-related concerns and the emotional and mental wellbeing weaved into a patient's aesthetic concerns, vulnerability and empathy from practitioners is particularly important in medical aesthetics.

"My view is one of diplomacy, understanding and recognition of the vulnerability that's being exchanged here, as well as being vulnerable with your patients. People feel very uncomfortable with that. The other day, a patient was telling me about her husband's experience, who had just had a brain tumor, and that he had been paralyzed with surgery. My own mother had been diagnosed with a brain tumor a few months prior and she hadn't had surgery, and as the patient was crying, I started crying. Real connection happened at that moment. I was vulnerable, the patient was vulnerable and she felt cared for; she felt seen. I think some people pay lip service, but I'm trying to live it. When you talk to people, you can tell if someone is being genuine or not. Empathy can't be taught. Either you're an empathetic person who feels or you're not. I've been fortunate in that the network of people around me are all very empathetic. It also challenges me to reflect on myself and my practices," says Dr. Khalifian.

Prioritizing Mental Health: Learning to Listen & W.A.I.T. (Why Am I Talking)

One of these people that have helped Dr. Khalifian in his empathetic and considerate approach to patient care is his wife, Chandra, who happens to be a clinical psychologist. Her expertise in psychology has proven invaluable, with Dr. Khalifian pointing to one piece of advice in particular that challenged him to rethink his approach to communication; one that helps facilitate meaningful interractions with patients during consultations. The beauty of her advice lies in its simplicity, as it utilizes a simple, easy to remember acronym that gets straight to the point.

"My wife is a clinical psychologist and I talk a lot, so she said to me, 'You need to stop talking and listen.' I was like, 'I know, but I forget.' She said, 'Just remember this acronym, W.A.I.T.: Why Am I Talking.' It hit me. Am I just talking to hear the sound of my voice? I'm going to get way more out of this interaction if I stop and listen to you than if I'm just talking to you. It's very uncomfortable for people, but I think it is appropriate to challenge ourselves to just stop and listen. I'm also a fixer, and particularly in medicine, the desire is always to fix the problem. But sometimes it's just recognizing that the problem exists. That in and of itself is reassuring. It makes you whole in some ways."

Dr. Khalifian leaves us with this final insightful observation, stating, "All of these things that we're talking about are soft skills, but the difference is not how good of a botulinum toxin injector you are or how good you are at using the appropriate settings on an energy-based device, right? It's about how good you are at connecting with someone, understanding their needs, reassuring them when times are tough and holding their hand during the post-operative period. I think caring for someone is the essence of all of those soft skills. The meat and potatoes of your practice are the outcomes that you can create, but all the accoutrements, if you will, are the soft skills. They make the difference between a doctor you'll keep going to and one you won't." ME

Rebecca Lane is the managing editor of *MedEsthetics*.

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DETAILS BY JOHNNY FRANCO, M.D.



Futuristic Fat Treatments: The Natural Filler of the Future

Futuristic fat transfer technologies promise to revolutionize this natural filler option.

Fat has always been an intriguing but challenging futuristic filler for several reasons. In the past several years, it has gained increased interest from both patients and providers as a natural filler. Volume replacement through fat transfer is not a new option; it has been utilized for years in procedures such as Brazilian Butt Lifts, facial augmentation and now, breast augmentation. However, fat transfer procedures have always faced challenges, including the difficulty in effectively harvesting fat, the inability to store fat for later use and concerns regarding fat viability post-transfer. While fat transfer has found utility in certain scenarios, it has also posed challenges for widespread adoption, as it is difficult and time consuming to use in the office setting. Patients that are part of the weight loss revolution may not have a significant amount of fat for transfer and the unpredictability has limited the precision placement.

Exciting advancements are on the horizon, particularly as many patients embark on their weight loss journeys and strive for a fit and fabulous lifestyle. Patients

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increasingly desire natural-looking results in their aesthetic transformations. Some of the promising developments in the field of futuristic fat transfer include fat banking, fat processing and methods to enhance fat take rates.

Fat Banking

A company called Tissue Cell Technologies has been developing technology that allows fat to be stored for future use. The future holds the potential for us to bank the idea of performing liposuction, storing fat and using it at a later date. Imagine in the context of the weight loss revolution, being able to perform liposuction, store the fat and then use it for targeted, isolated fat transfers to areas of the body where it's most desired. This would make breast enhancement with fat transfer much more attractive, as serial fat transfer sessions can easily be performed to help patients achieve the results they desire. This could revolutionize how we sculpt and shape our bodies, allowing us to achieve the aesthetic appearance we dream of by placing fat where we want it and not where we don't. The fat could also be stored after a mommy makeover and then utilized for facial fillers, hand rejuvenation or any future aesthetic enhancements without the need for more liposuction. This process would simplify fat transfer surgeries, as it would involve one major liposuction session followed by having fat readily available for subsequent treatments.

Fat Processing

Cadaver Fat As a Filler

In the not-so-distant future, a company called Tiger Biomedical has developed the ability to utilize processed cadaver fat as a filler. While the concept of using processed fat as a filler isn't new, it has historically been limited to small quantities, posing challenges for substantial changes, especially in procedures like breast augmentation or body contouring. Tiger Biomedical has taken a unique approach by offering larger volumes of processed fat, with kits containing 15 to 30cc of fat available for patients. This advancement opens up a wide range of treatment options, from non-surgical Brazilian Butt Lifts to breast enhancements. This creates a unique opportunity for breast and body rejuvenation in a manner that we have never had previously. The concept of non-surgical butt and breast enhancements is not new, but we have had limited meaningful options. This innovation also presents the exciting possibility of improving the overall appearance post-liposuction, providing an off-the-shelf fat filler option. Many patients seek natural fillers and aesthetic improvements, making this development highly anticipated in the field.



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Enhancing Quality & Survival of Fat

Precision Fat Processing

Enhancing the quality of the fat harvested is the next evolution in precision fat processing. There are a couple of advancements on the horizon, with some that have already arrived. One such process is called Viality, an innovation in fat processing. This Precision Fat Processing System has demonstrated in studies that it can yield fat take rates of up to 80%. The key benefit is precision: ensuring that patients receive the purest fat possible, which leads to more predictable results and improved outcomes. This addresses a historical challenge where fat take rates varied significantly. Viality achieves this by separating oils and fluids, ensuring that only the best quality fat is injected. This gives providers an unparalleled ability to sculpt and shape effectively, providing optimal results and predictability for patients.



Enhanced Fat Survival During Transfer

The combination of radiofrequency energy and helium plasma is another exciting treatment option. Historically, this technology has been used for skin tightening, but recent findings show promising improvements in skin quality through the combined use of radiofrequency energy and helium, which generates inert plasma, previously earning it the nickname of J-Plasma. Animal studies have suggested that this plasma can enhance fat survival when combined with fat transfer. While human trials are still pending, the potential for improved fat survival and precision in fat processing is highly anticipated.

Regenerative Potential of Fat Cells

LipoCube is an exciting advancement in fat processing. The concept revolves around transforming standard liposuction fat into microparticles, including micro and nano fat. We're only beginning to explore its potential beyond mere filler applications in various aspects of aesthetic medicine. The regenerative properties of fat are continuously evolving, with LipoCube aiming to convert large fat globules into smaller micro and nanoparticles. These particles can be utilized for skin rejuvenation and other regenerative purposes. The beauty of LipoCube lies in its ability to simplify the liposuction process while offering customizable particle sizes for different aesthetic procedures. This opens up unprecedented possibilities for facial rejuvenation and holds promise for the future of regenerative medicine, tapping into the regenerative potential of fat cells. We're just scratching the surface of what this technology can offer.

The Era of Futuristic Fat Treatments

The era of futuristic fat treatments is upon us, with advancements both currently available and forthcoming. With the rise of the weight loss revolution and patients seeking natural augmentations, such as breast or buttock enhancements, as well as facial fillers, fat remains an intriguing but often mythical option for patients and providers. Its natural feel, longevity and compatibility with one's own body tissue make it highly desirable. The ability to store or enhance fat transfer processes brings immense excitement for patients and providers alike.

The future appears bright in the realm of fat treatments, with numerous exciting developments contributing to the overall shift in plastic surgery towards natural augmentation. ME



Johnny Franco, M.D., is a board-certified plastic surgeon and owner of Austin Plastic Surgeon with an impressive history of publications, presentations and accolades, including the Merck Index Award and the Walter S. Haven Prize. He is an active member of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, the American Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons and the Austin Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons. He is currently Clinical Faculty at The University of Texas Dell Medical School. He also is a reviewer for the Aesthetic Journal and Annals of Plastic Surgery, where he reviews articles for publication from other plastic surgeons worldwide.

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Next-Gen Global Approach to Ageless Aesthetics

Treatment advances integrating health and hormone therapies with AI and regenerative aesthetics

by Rebecca Lane

The U.S. anti-aging market was around $18 billion in 2022, and is expected to grow to over $34 billion by 2032, driving new research and treatment innovations to keep pace with the growing demands for aesthetic treatments to rewind the clock and reverse the inevitable signs of age.[1] The over 40 age demographic, particularly women, are starting to speak out about the uncontrollable physical changes that come with middle age and lower hormones, especially when it comes to menopause. Menopause is finally starting to get the attention it is due and driving treatment innovations to combat this significant physical upset that comes for every woman.



Hormone blood tests can identify and rule out any hormone imbalances to address.

The aesthetic innovations leading this revolution in anti-aging are centered around balancing hormones with bioidentical hormone replacement therapy, the advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) capable of offering anti-aging treatment options that go above and beyond anything that the medical aesthetics industry has seen before and the regenerative aesthetics movement that is gradually finding ways to literally turn back the clock on a cellular level. The combination of these three breakthrough innovations in aesthetics is taking the concept of reversing the aging process through a concentrated holistic approach and turning it into a reality.

Khoi Vu, M.D., is one practitioner taking advantage of this three-pronged approach to holistic anti-aging, combining hormone balancing and restoring physical health with AI and regenerative aesthetic treatments to help his patients over 40 restore their lost youth and vitality from the inside out. "What we try to do first is balance your body and give your body what it needs. Typically, around 40 to 50 years old, hormone levels have dropped, so we will first balance your hormones. Then we want to make sure patients are eating correctly. We usually suggest something like the keto, or some other kind of fasting diet that works for most people. Then we add in supplements, around four or five supplements that we should all be taking for our health, suggest an exercise plan for roughly three to four days a week, make sure patients are getting enough sleep and minimizing their stress. Once you do that, you can help patients mostly bounce back, and then you can do anti-aging therapy using different regenerative and rejuvenating aesthetic tools to restore and rejuvenate patients' youthful appearance and help them achieve their aesthetic goals," explains Dr. Vu.

Adressing Physical Health: Balancing Hormones

The first step of a holistic approach to anti-aging and ageless aesthetics is to address any hormone imbalances and restore hormones to their optimal levels. Dr. Vu states, "Once you reach between 40 and 50 years old, people's health just goes straight downward. I first want to balance your body and keep your body healthy. This way patients can avoid poor health, sickness, disability, etc. The goal of anti-aging is not for us to live forever, but rather help patients live to their 50's, 60's, 70's, etc., and still have a vibrant, active body, a sharp mind, the ability to be independent, have a good quality of life and still feel like they can live their lives to the fullest. That's the goal."

Diagnosing Hormonal Imbalances

Before incorporating aesthetic treatments, any potential underlying causes of health concerns patients may have need to be assessed. This involves running a hormone blood test to identify or rule out any deficiencies. Many hormones can fall out of balance, causing a variety of unpleasant symptoms depending on the unique role that hormone plays in the body. Hormone imbalance can occur as a result of medications, stress, menopause, age, a medical condition and more, negatively affecting different processes in the body, such as metabolism, growth and development and reproduction.

"Usually around the age of 40 years or older, we start noticeably aging. When women go through menopause around 50 years old, depending on the individual, hormone levels drop significantly. During your teens and 20's your hormones are at their highest level, which is why you're young and vibrant. Once you hit your 30's, your hormones start going down, but in these early stages, you don't notice it as much. Once you get to 40-years-old, you notice more that your body is aging. You're more tired, a bit more fatigued than before," states Dr. Vu.

- **Menopause:** During menopause the ovaries' production of estrogen and progesterone declines until it ceases completely as women approach the end of their monthly menstrual cycle. Symptoms and the speed at which they progress can vary and include hot flashes, insomnia, weight fluctuation, fatigue, mood swings and excessive sweating. Dr. Vu explains, "Once you hit 50 and menopause, that means you have no hormones. At that point your body declines physically and you have an accelerating agent. So, I check all your hormones, do blood and saliva tests and to see what your hormone levels are. If they're low, then I will raise those levels back to their optimal point or the level they were at when the individual was a teenager. Regular blood tests will have a

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Doctor conducts ultrasound examination of patient thyroid gland.

range, but it reflects the hormone levels of an older body. If treatment is based on this scale, you'll feel like you still have an older body. But, you will feel the way you did when you were younger if we return your hormones to their original optimal levels, so that is what we do."

- **Thyroid:** Hypothyroidism (low thyroid) can occur as a result of the aging process, genetics, medications, medical conditions, gender and more. Around 20 million Americans have a thyroid disorder, mostly hypothyroidism, with 60% unaware of their condition. Women are roughly five to eight times more likely to have thyroid problems than men, with around one in eight women developing a thyroid disorder within her lifetime. The likelihood of women developing a thyroid problem increases with age, most commonly occurring between the ages of 30 and 50.[2] The most common symptoms include weight fluctuations, depression, low energy, muscle weakness, dry skin, increased sensitivity to cold and increased blood cholesterol, among others. "Women in fact need the most attention for hormone imbalances of the thyroid. We find zero women past 50 that don't suffer from low thyroid levels and most men past 40 have low thyroid. The blood test doctors use for thyroid levels is very inaccurate. They typically check the precursor to the thyroid, using the thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH) screen test. It's just a screen test. If it says you might have low thyroid, you have low thyroid. But if it says you don't have low thyroid, it doesn't necessarily mean anything. We check the T3 thyroid hormone itself, and we check to see if you have any virus in your thyroid. Even if you have low thyroid, doctors will generally put you on something like levothyroxine, which is synthetic. We don't use that. It doesn't work. Instead, we use natural, bioidentical hormones to balance thyroid hormone deficiencies, and that works in pretty much everybody," says Dr. Vu.

- **Testosterone:** While low testosterone can be a result of aging, it can also occur because of an injury to the testical, a medical condition and other factors. Symptoms of low testosterone can include low lobido, depression, sexual disfunction (erectile disfunction), fatigue, low energy, hair loss, hot flashes, decreased muscle mass, gynecomastia and more. According to Dr. Vu, "The most important hormone for men is testosterone. Previously, we would see men begin to have low testosterone levels around 40 or 50 years old. Now we see teenagers with low testosterone. The testicles are not protected like the ovaries, so someone could get kicked or injured. The worst thing for testicles are having cell phones and laptops next to them. So, we are now seeing teenage patients here with lower testosterone. They're feeling more like 78-year-old men, and they act like that. They're tired, fatigued, have no libido, no zest and are depressed. When your teenager used to be running around without a care in the world, their parents are then like, 'What's wrong with my kid?' Once we balance their testosterone levels, they feel like normal guys again."

Balancing Hormones: Treatments

Once any hormone imbalances are diagnosed, treatments like hormone replacement therapy restore deficient hormone levels to their optimal state. This noticeably improves patients' physical health and appearance, and primes cells to better respond to aesthetic treatments that are subsequently incorporated into individual patient treatment plans.

Treatments like hormone replacement therapy restore deficient hormone levels to their optimal state...improves patient health and appearance and primes cells to better respond to aesthetic treatments.

- **Hormone Replacement Therapy:** Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) utilizes natural and bioidentical hormones to treat various hormone imbalances, which increase in likelihood with age. Bioidentical hormones are able to interact seamlessly

Image by H_Ko at Adobe Stock



Add basic supplements essential to any individual's health to build upon the improvements gained after optimizing patient's hormones.

with the body's hormone receptors, restoring patients' hormone levels to a more youthful state. This helps patients feel better physically as well as function efficiently. "Once we do that, usually within days or weeks patients feel better physically and mentally. With their hormone levels balanced, patients then also age slower," states Dr. Vu.

- **NAD+ Therapy:** Your body relies on a compound called nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide (NAD+) crucial to its overall function, responsible for running your metabolism, giving you energy and repairing DNA damage. NAD+ therapy is an anti-aging therapy that stimulates cell regeneration, improving your physical and mental health, with numerous benefits including DNA repair, anti-aging, improved memory and cognition, weight management, increased energy, detoxification from substances, athletic performance and increased lifespan. NAD+ therapy is particularly beneficial for patients with a chronic condition like diabetes, cardiovascular disease, chronic fatigue, or a sleep disorder. The treatment administers NAD+ molecules via three different methods: intravenously (100% absorption rate), via subcutaneous shots (60% absorption rate) and sublingual spray (60% absorption rate).

Lifestyle Treatment Plan

Once the crucial first step of balancing patients' hormones is completed, giving patients a diet and lifestyle treatment plan is paramount to helping them build upon their improved physical health and take advantage of the boost resulting from their optimized hormone levels. Dr. Vu advises patients start taking six supplements that comprise the essential vitamins and minerals every individual should take for their health, including fish oil, vitamin D, vitamin C, probiotics, melatonin and vitamin A. In addition, patients are given a diet to follow, with Dr. Vu suggesting some kind of fasting diet like keto that patients can follow without too much difficulty and will aid in any desired weight loss, improve their health further and help improve possible conditions such as diabetes. Add to this an exercise plan for roughly 3 to 4 days a week and a plan to improve and ensure good sleeping habits and minimize stress, and patients have a treatment plan designed to tackle the initial challenge of improving their physical health, with the added benefit of this also improving skin health and overall appearance.

Dr. Vu explains, "I'll teach them how to fish instead of giving them a fish. So, we're really teaching patients why they need these things in their body, why they need to take supplements and eat in this manner. We give them insight

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into why you want to do it. This gives patients the tools and ability to take responsibility for maintaining their health. Big pharma has spread the message that when your physical health breaks down to rely on prescription medication to fix it, but it doesn't work like that. To have good health, you have to earn it, you have to invest in it. To maintain a healthy, vibrant body takes time and dedication. That's why we're trying to get patients to adopt a more health conscious rather than sickness conscious mindset. Once you switch to a health conscious frame of mind, you make different decisions."

By focusing on addressing patients' physical health and the underlying causes of what is making them age faster, including the consideration of hormone imbalances that increase as we age and contribute significantly to our aesthetic concerns as we reach middle age, these deficiencies, which also result in less-than-optimal outcomes after aesthetic treatments, can be fixed. This in turn, will improve skin health and appearance while also metabolically optimizing the body's cells to better respond to cosmetic treatments for optimal results. "Health is your most precious thing. It's health span, not lifespan that you're enjoying, so that's why we want to try to help you heal on these levels," states Dr. Vu. "All of it is connected. You need your body health and your gut health because that affects skin health as well as your mental health. It's all tied together."

Incorporating Aesthetic Treatments

Once the body is metabolically optimized with healthy cells now primed to respond to aesthetic treatments and optimize treatment results, incorporating aesthetic treatments can help accelerate appearance-related enhancements resulting from improved physical health.

"My goal is to build your inside first, like first building the engine of your car. Once you first build your engine, your body, then you can choose to enhance the appearance of your exterior with aesthetic technologies. I want to help you heal yourself, so we focus on inner health to first get people to the point where they are internally healthy. And when you're healthy, you get better results. Now there are aesthetic technologies that can help patients accelerate these results without the need for surgery, treatments that may cause a lot of pain or the use of synthetic chemicals. The technology now is just so incredible that even in your 50's or 60's, you can still look like you're in your late 30's or 40's. You don't have to go through the normal aging process in the way that your dad or mom did. You can basically use technology to improve your health, your life, your looks, etc."

Aesthetic Treatments for the Face

Without a doubt, the advances in AI technology and regenerative aesthetic treatments, in the form of innovative new devices as well as injectable treatments, are taking the medical aesthetics industry and our ability to fight and even reverse the aging process to unprecedented new heights. "AI is revolutionizing the skincare industry, especially when it comes to anti-aging," states Dr. Vu. "We are excited to offer AI treatment packages to our clients, because it's a natural and effective way to achieve remarkable results without invasive procedures."

- **RF Microneedling AI:** AI microneedling is used to initiate the body's natural repair process and skin remodeling, thereby stimulating collagen production to improve skin elasticity, reduce fine lines and plump the skin for a more youthful and radiant appearance. This technology utilizes a combination of monopolar radiofrequency (RF) and artificial intelligence (AI) to optimize a single-pass treatment for the heating and coagulation of deep tissues, allowing for penetration of up to 8mm below the skin's surface, twice the depth of regular microneedling. This combination of AI and monopolar RF reduces discomfort while maximizing results. It can also be combined with targeted ultrasound to increase collagen and elastin production by almost 50% and hyaluronidase by 224%. Dr. Vu says, "AI microneedling tightens the skin on your



Incorporate regenerative treatments to accelerate results.

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Add basic supplements essential to any individual's health to build upon the improvements gained after optimizing patient's hormones.

entire face and neck. Usually, microneedling is very painful, and a lot of times patients cannot complete the session because of the pain. However, this one uses AI technology to give patients the precise frequency energy to provide optimal results, but without the pain. On a scale of 1 to 10, the pain is closer to a 2, 3 or 4 at most versus 8, 9 or 10."

- **RF + HIFES (High-Intensity Facial Electromagnetic Stimulation):** RF for stimulating collagen and elastin production is used in combination with electromagnetic stimulation that selectively contracts facial muscles to sculpt, build structure, lift and tone the skin, restoring firmness and elasticity.
- **PRP Therapy:** Platelet rich plasma (PRP) therapy uses a patient's own plasma to isolate platelets that are rich in growth factors and stimulate cell growth, collagen and elastin production and re-vascularization of the skin. This provides a myriad of aesthetic benefits, including reducing discoloration and hyper-pigmentation, brightening uneven tone and texture to promote a healthy, radiant glow, minimizing pore size and scarring. In addition to skin radiance, PRP provides a plumping effect on sagging skin, improves elasticity, increases volume in hollow areas and helps eliminate puffy eyes and dark circles to rejuvenate tired skin, diminish fine lines and wrinkles and restore patients' radiant, youthfulness.

Aesthetic Treatments for the Body:

- **RF High-Intensity Focused Electromagnetic Energy:** Advanced RF heating technology melts away fat while high-intensity focused electromagnetic energy stimulates muscle strength and growth. This allows for optimal fat burning while also building muscle without having to go to the gym.
- **Accoustic Wave Therapy:** Accoustic wave therapy (AWT)is a newer technology being utilized in medicine in general as well as in medical aesthetics. According to Dr. Vu, "This is new technology that helps with muscular problems or disorders. By sending waves into your body, it is able to help with neuropathy from diabetes and other conditions that become more common with age like erectile dysfunction. ED is very common, with 50% of the men past the age of 40 suffering from it. This device is able to restore function after four to six sessions with no pain or side effects. So, we're trying to offer this kind of technology to help patients with that aspect of the aging process as well."

Final Thoughts

When it comes to ageless aesthetics, a global approach to anti-aging that seeks to account for every biological factor that contributes to the aging process is truly the future of this industry and the concept of ageless aesthetics. Combining advances in restoring physical health and hormone levels with the revolutionary advances in AI technology and regenerative aesthetics treatments truly combats the aging process and signs of age in a way that is set to shape the future of medical aesthetics. Addressing patients' physical health first leads to the health and appearance of their skin and body improving. Then when they receive aesthetic treatments, the body and cells are primed to respond, particularly when it comes to regenerative aesthetic treatments. "Everything in the body is connected. If you have better inner health, then our outer health is going to reflect that. People that are physically healthy, they look more vibrant and glowing. That, in turn, improves your mental health because if you're healthy physically, you feel better mentally. Add in aesthetics and you feel more attractive and confident, further improving your mental health. It is all connected." ME

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2. https://www.verywellhealth.com/hypothyroidism-facts-6502021

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ROSACEA AWARENESS MONTH HIGHLIGHTS THE IMPORTANCE OF ROSACEA-SAFE SKIN CARE

The National Rosacea Society (NRS) designates April as Rosacea Awareness Month to educate the public on this chronic facial skin disorder estimated to affect more than 16 million Americans and to urge those who suspect they may have it to see a dermatologist for diagnosis, treatment and guidance on gentle skin care. The most common individual sign of rosacea is persistent redness on the central part of the face — the cheeks, nose, forehead and chin. The redness may be accompanied by itching, burning or stinging and sufferers may also experience bumps and pimples or develop tiny visible blood vessels on their skin. Many rosacea sufferers turn to skin care products and cosmetics to treat or cover up these signs and symptoms, mistaking them for sunburn or acne.

CLINIQUE X MOUNT SINAI TACKLE AGING, ECZEMA & ALLERGIES FOR ACTIONABLE INNOVATION

Clinique and the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai are launching the Mount Sinai-Clinique Healthy Skin Dermatology Center to, "develop forward-thinking research in dermatology, exploring the biological underpinnings of how skin ages, skin allergies and inflammatory or eczematous skin conditions, including eczema (or atopic dermatitis) and contact dermatitis." In founding the center, Clinique has made a philanthropic commitment of $5 million over seven years. The research conducted at the center will focus on applicable scientific discoveries to advance allergy science and develop topical innovations to address skin conditions, per the organizations. Research will comprise all ages, genders, races and ethnicities, and will, "investigate the effects of factors such as diet, exercise and stress on the skin of healthy people."

AAD ADVISORY BOARD REJECTS RESOLUTION TO REMOVE DEI INITIATIVES

The American Academy of Dermatology advisory board voted to reject the resolution to remove the DEI initiatives and expand the academy's mission to prioritize diversity and address inclusion issues within the field, per NBC News. The proposed resolution links the "DEI movement" to antisemitism and claims DEI efforts have evolved into an unfair political movement that stifles "diversity of thought" and creates a "racist" or "nonracist" binary. Doctors opposing the resolution requested specific examples of members experiencing antisemitism to be presented to the DEI committee and AAD board so that the issues could be addressed directly and corrected immediately.

NOVAESTIQ'S PLATFORM OF INNOVATIONS SET TO SHAKE UP AESTHETICS MARKET

Novaestiq Corp., a growth-oriented, aesthetic company focused on aesthetic and medical dermatological product innovations for practices and patients, announced it's definitive agreement with Croma-Pharma GmbH to be the exclusive U.S. distributor of the Saypha line of dermal fillers. Novaestiq has an existing collaboration with Croma-Pharma to develop next-generation dermal fillers utilizing novel cross-linking capabilities. Novaestiq also announced that it's currently in exclusive negotiations to combine with Coronado Aesthetics, LLC. Coronado's signature products, Sebacia, FDA-cleared gold microparticles, indicated for use with 1064 nm lasers to treat acne vulgaris and a first-in-class FDA-cleared silver photo-particle topical gel indicated for use with 810 nm diode lasers for removal of light-colored hair will be branded under the Novaestiq aestheticIQ intelligence platform and launched later this year. This combined offering will allow Novaestiq to cater to a significant segment of the U.S. aesthetics market in addition to supporting improved practice economics.

FDA CRACKS DOWN ON KNOCKOFF OZEMPIC

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued warning letters to two online marketers of semaglutide(Wegovy/Ozempic) and tirzepatide(Mounjaro) for selling unapproved, untested drugs to consumers through their websites. The two companies, US Chemlabs and Synthetix, have an opportunity to make proper adjustments, according to the letters. Failure to adequately address the concerns within 15 business days could result in legal action from the FDA. Other purveyors of knock-off semaglutide are being shut down and Novo Nordisk announced settlements with two clinic/spa facilities being forced to cease selling unapproved versions of semaglutide products. Novo brought legal action against two Florida clinics —

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Nuvida Rx Weight Loss in Tallahassee and Cosmetic Laser Professionals Med Spa in Miami — for "trademark infringement, false advertising, and unfair competition," according to both settlements.

BEAUTY LOUNGE MEDICAL SPA INTRODUCES PERSONALIZED BIO-IDENTICAL HORMONE PELLET THERAPY



Beauty Lounge Medical Spa has introduced Bio-Identical Hormone Pellet Therapy to its service offerings, a plant-based treatment designed to combat hormonal imbalance symptoms such as fatigue, mood instability, brain fog, anxiety and more. The treatment utilizes small, custom-compounded pellets containing bioidentical hormones. These hormones, including estradiol and testosterone, are derived from natural plant sources and are structurally identical to the hormones produced by the body. The Bio-Identical Hormone Pellet Therapy is ideal for treating fatigue, mood swings, low libido, weight gain, brain fog, sleep disturbances, hot flashes and decreased muscle mass. It is designed to reduce menopause symptoms, hormone-related mood disorders, thyroid dysfunction and adrenal fatigue.

EVENTS

May 2-5, The Aesthetic Meeting 2024, Vancouver Convention Center, Vancouver, BC Canada, Contact: admin@theaestheticsociety.org, 562.799.2356, meetings.theaestheticsociety.org/the-aesthetic-meeting/index.php
May15-19, 19th Annual Music City SCALE, Grand Hyatt Nashville, Nashville, Tennessee, Contact: info@scalemusiccity.com, 904.309.6235, scalemusiccity.com
May 18-21, AAPS 102nd Annual Meeting, The Westin Copley Place, Boston, Massachusetts, Contact: meetings@aaps.org, 978.927.8330, meeting.aaps1921.org
June 11-15, ISAPS World Congress 2024, Las Americas Convention Centre, Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, Contact: events@isaps.org, +44.(0)20.7038.7814 (Ext. 508), isaps.org/education/events/world-congress-2024-cartagena



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Safety Concerns Spark Cosmetic Misuse of Ozempic Controversy

Concerns about counterfeit Ozempic products and potential long-term effects has resulted in some pushback against GLP-1 drugs.

While Ozempic continues to remain popular and even expand into other industries, emerging safety concerns are spurring conversations about the drug's overall impact on individuals using it for weight loss.

Eli Lilly launched a public service campaign against using the GLP-1 inhibitor and other Lilly weight loss drugs simply for cosmetic purposes. The company's LillyDirect service allows patients to order 14 medications for home delivery, 12 of which are various types of insulin, all capped at $35 per month. The program also includes the weight loss drug Zepbound (tirzepatide) and one migraine medication, Emgality (galcenezumab).

"Some of the controversy was centered around the uncertainty of the long-term effects of these medications," said Johnny Franco, M.D., board-certified plastic surgeon and owner of Austin Plastic Surgeon. "There were moral concerns about whether we were diverting medication from diabetic patients. However, this controversy has diminished significantly as people witness the immense benefits of these medications month after month."

The drug's popularity was so quick that supply issues hit the markets. This caused consumers to gravitate toward cheaper counterfeit versions of Ozempic and off-brand medications, which has spurred lawsuits. In a consumer survey conducted by 9am Health, 38% of respondents have tried knock-off GLP-1's or black-market weight loss products that have not gone through FDA approval in the past.

The knockoff medications also pose higher risks. According to data from America's Poison Centers, there were nearly 3,000 calls involving semaglutide from January through November 2023, an increase of 15 times the amount of calls reported since 2019. In 94% of calls, semaglutide was the only substance reported. These calls are mostly from adults ages 40 to 70, with the largest group ranging from 60 to 69, per CNN. These increased risks aren't only related to injections of compounded forms of the medication, but also the accompanying click pen intended for precise dosing of the prescription drug. In one case, a caller said they were having trouble with the pen and accidentally gave themselves an entire month of doses at once.

Another point of concern was the long-term effects. The rapid weight loss induced by Ozempic can lead to dermatological changes, including increased signs of aging such as lines and wrinkles (now referred to as "Ozempic face"), a hollowed-out appearance and lipodystrophy, which alters the way the body accumulates and stores fat. Nordesthetics Clinic in Lithuania, Kaunas, reported a surge in visits from U.S. patients during 2023, with many looking to address excess skin from weight loss. The skin issues are not only from Ozempic but also from traditional weight loss procedures like bariatric surgery and tummy tucks.

"Skin-related issues are commonly observed in patients using medications like semaglutide or GLP medications," Franco said. "The primary concern is the noticeable facial changes attributed to rapid weight loss. This can result in skin laxity and facial hollowness. Fortunately, non-invasive treatments have proven effective in addressing these issues."

According to Dr. Franco, most skin laxity cases involving mild to moderate weight loss in young and healthy patients can be addressed using non-surgical approaches such as skin tightening with radiofrequency, microneedling and ultrasound therapy in combination with dermal fillers and biostimulants.

"In instances of significant weight loss, especially with the use of semaglutide medications, some patients may eventually require surgical intervention," Franco said. "However, the majority of cases can be successfully managed with the mentioned non-invasive treatments."

While these aversions likely won't slow down the Ozempic's meteoric rise to the mainstream, issues with poison centers and misinformation presents a clear need for stronger regulations and increased public awareness of exactly what semaglutide is and how it can affect the body. ME



Tony Scianna is the associate editor of *MedEsthetics.*

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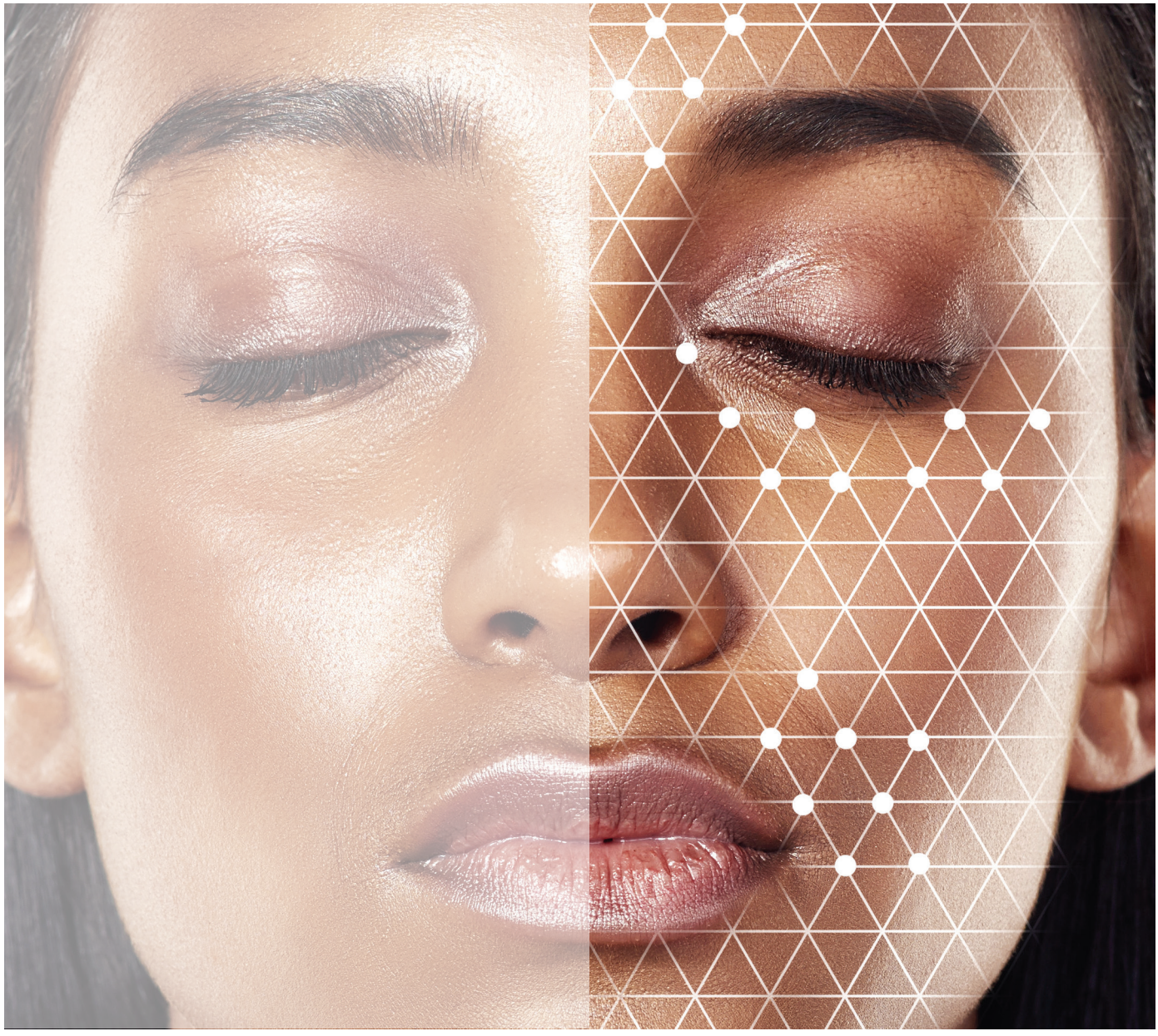

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