



Continuing Education in the Practice of Aesthetics

"*Primum Non Nocere* – First, do no harm" is a fundamental principle which guides the medical practice of every doctor regardless of field or expertise, but must be held in the highest accord particularly in the context of aesthetic practice. This is because patients who seek aesthetic treatments are often not sick, but desire improvements in appearance and well-being. As such, it is paramount for a doctor in aesthetic practice to take every step possible to minimise complications arising from such treatments, from undesirable aesthetic outcomes to catastrophic medical sequelae. Yet, how can a well-meaning, diligent doctor avoid doing harm to a patient, if he does not know that what he is doing is potentially harmful?

The real challenge, then, is ignorance. And the only solution is knowledge.

FACING THE CHALLENGE

In the practice of aesthetics, there is no structured teaching, no exams, no research obligations or any specific impetus to accumulate knowledge. At the same time, there are new technologies and new techniques being developed every day in our industry, as well as in the (almost completely unregulated but closely related) beauty industry. Coupled with the fact that many young doctors initially enter the industry with little to no experience in aesthetics, it is clear to see how easily a knowledge gap can form.

A sound understanding of the fundamentals will stand any doctor in a good stead. Dermatologists and plastic surgeons in aesthetic practice will have acquired these fundamentals through their specialty training; yet, they must still constantly update themselves to keep up with the rapidly evolving practice. For GPs like me, it is crucial for us to work doubly hard to secure those fundamentals, *and* to keep up to date.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-LEARNING

When a doctor is self-motivated to learn, he will find that resources are everywhere. Senior doctors with years of experience in the practice are literally vaults of knowledge that can be tapped upon, while discussions and sharing with colleagues can often be most insightful. At the same time, teaching a younger doctor is an excellent way to consolidate knowledge, as well as identify one's own knowledge gaps. Every patient encounter is a valuable learning opportunity; so much can be gained just by truly listening to them, as well as to feedback from one's own assistants and staff.

Books may not be fashionable anymore, but remain an excellent and inexpensive source of knowledge. For example, there are books that do not just teach anatomy, but specifically the importance of understanding

anatomy correlating to each area into which we commonly inject; as well as to each indication that we commonly treat. Today, up-to-date journals, research articles and publications are also easily accessible through a single click on the Internet.

THE ROLE OF STRUCTURED LEARNING

Today, there are hundreds of GP clinics in Singapore which primarily offer aesthetic services. Young doctors are joining the industry on a monthly basis – just flip to the last page of this magazine and chances are you will find an advertisement looking to hire one. It is crucial that our regulator, the Singapore Medical Council (SMC), recognises the very real fact that hundreds of GPs perform hundreds of thousands of aesthetic procedures yearly in Singapore; and that continuing medical education (CME) for this group of doctors in areas pertinent to their daily practice is paramount for patient safety.

The Certificate of Competence (COC) course organised by Dermatologists is an excellent starting point where a breadth of knowledge across the multiple facets of aesthetic practice is taught, basic sciences explained, and potential complications highlighted. It must be noted how successfully the SMC's Aesthetic Practice Oversight Committee (APOG) ensured

that all this knowledge were effectively transferred, by making the COC course and accreditation compulsory for all doctors in aesthetic practice.

However, currently, almost every course or conference related to aesthetic practice is not CME accredited, and by extension unrecognised. In fact, even the COC course itself is not accredited for CME! Try to submit a journal you have read for accreditation on the CME website, and you will find a checkbox specifically asking whether that journal is related to aesthetics, in which case it will almost certainly be rejected.

ACCREDITATION EMPOWERS LEARNING

I have had the privilege of attending many such courses and conferences, and I have learnt a great deal from them that has continuously changed my daily practice for safer, and for better. Though many of these conferences are organised by our suppliers, based on my experience, the focus of these talks are invariably always on patient safety and minimising risks and complications, followed by methods to improve or more consistently deliver desirable aesthetic outcomes. The products carried by the suppliers are mentioned only in passing, while off-label and non-Health Sciences Authority-approved products and procedures are never directly addressed during the talks.

For example, I attended a cadaveric dissection course held at Singapore General Hospital's Academia which was organised by a major pharmaceutical company. The speakers at the course were renowned anatomists and plastic surgeons from around the world. For a GP like myself, watching the

dissection live while listening to the experts point out the crucial anatomical landmarks, danger zones to avoid, age and ethnic variations, as well as how the understanding of anatomy directly correlates with the injections I do gave me far greater understanding of my daily work. Subsequently, I spoke to the organisers, and was told that CME accreditation for that conference was rejected year after year by the SMC, despite the fact that it is affiliated to a university, follows strict guidelines, and is accredited by similar regulatory bodies in many other countries where it is held.

THE CULTURE OF EDUCATION

It is my sincere hope that all doctors in aesthetic practice will have the chance to attend such conferences regularly, which will help provide the young doctors with a solid foundation to build upon, as well as help the experienced doctors consolidate their knowledge and keep them up to date. With support from the regulatory bodies through CME accreditation, organisers can better understand and comply with guidelines required for the professional conduct of these courses, while doctors will be more motivated to attend. In turn, this will lead to more of such courses being organised, and organised within the required regulations, which will improve both the reach and the quality of continuing education in the practice of aesthetics in Singapore.

Such a culture of education can only truly be realised through motivation of the doctors, support from the suppliers and recognition by the regulatory bodies. By working together towards the common goal of patient safety, a positive feedback loop of continuing

education can be set in place, which will be beneficial for all the parties involved; but most importantly, for our patients. ♦

PROFILE



TEXT BY

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Dr Felix Li is the Medical Director of The Face Aesthetic Clinic. He was born on the same day as his wife, and they are excitedly anticipating the arrival of their little boy – their first! – come January. However, things may get complicated when Ford delivers his second wife in December.

