

Personal Experience in Aesthetic Practice

By Dr Benjamin Yim

Aesthetic medicine has evolved so substantially over the past few years that it has seen a growing interest amongst not just the general public, but doctors practising general medicine and other specialties as well. Important factors such as affluence, new perspective and definition of beauty, availability of information and a growing trend of anti-ageing lifestyle products and services have also contributed to its evolution. Aesthetic medicine no doubt fulfills a growing need in society, and this very need fuels its continuous revolutionary advancement.

The very dynamic nature of aesthetic medicine makes practising it interesting. The fact that each patient differs from the next, that each sees and defines beauty quite differently, positions practising aesthetic medicine as a continuous challenge to provide creative solutions to meet each patient's unique needs.

As in all businesses, practising aesthetic medicine has its pros and cons. One needs to be aware that the working hours are not fixed, procedures may be long, and opportunity to maximise revenue limited by the number of patients that can be treated per day. It has a higher start-up and operating cost, and a slow learning curve coupled with increased risk to patient complaint. These unavoidable factors of the practice can be viewed as the necessary evils of any businesses. They simply come in different packages.

The upside and more interesting part of the practice are founded in the challenge each patient brings that tests your skills and talent, creating opportunities for in-depth use of your training and ability, pushing you to excel, thus raising your level of competency. The solutions offered in aesthetic practice usually involve the use of an armamentarium of procedures to achieve the end result.

It usually requires the doctor to be competent in several of the procedures instead of specialising in one.

The solutions are thus tailored for the patient and are premium-priced. There is also a limited amount of glamour associated with aesthetic medicine practice, especially since it is relatively new, that is, lifestyle publications do seek you out for updates and advice on articles and angles for their features.

As patients differ in their requirements, 60% of clinic time is usually spent talking to them, while 40% is spent on procedures. Understanding the personal needs and expectations of the patient is key to deciding on the possible tailored solution. It is most important to explain the solution and especially the outcome. Pictures of "before and after" may help the patient understand and visualise the outcome better. Talking also allows one to establish good rapport with the patient to build trust and confidence. However, when your instincts and experience tell you so, it is also advisable to turn away unrealistic patients.

Constant skills upgrade is necessary both for the doctor and his staff. This can be expensive as most available training

for doctors are overseas. Staff needs to be continuously trained, to be able to explain and assist in procedures efficiently, as well as assist in managing post treatment enquiry. Unlike general and certain specialist practice, aesthetic practice services need to be marketed. New products and services need to be launched and patients need to be educated. The practice thus has its own set of potential challenges, and to manage them, certain basic "hygiene factors" should best be in place. They range from simply working within the Ministry's regulations and guidelines for advertising, the need to be religious about keeping good photo documentation and clinical notes, to practical business processes such as implementation of the "signing of consent form", which should be detailed and explained to patients. Having a CRM (Customer Relation Management) tool also helps a practice keep in touch, track and engage their patients, while also allowing deeper level of analysis of revenue and ROI (Return on Investments).

It is also useful to remember that simply knowing your own limitations, and referring to another practitioner if the patient's needs are beyond your scope, helps one avoid potential problems. Remember post-treatment complications can occur, so it is useful to avoid them; but if they still happen unexpectedly, then be good at managing them yourself while also making sure you are covered with the right category of medical insurance.

As aesthetic medicine is still in its infancy stage, it would be ideal then to provide all doctors wanting to practise aesthetic medicine with a local structured training programme which offers accreditation to raise the level of competency and recognition for the specialty itself. With more practitioners, a neutral platform, such as the SMA Aesthetic Convention, can then be organised to allow the healthy exchange and sharing of experience and ideas, where doctors can learn and interact with each other, to enhance this field of medicine within Singapore and beyond, while simultaneously perpetuating the dynamism of aesthetic medicine itself.

As one already practising aesthetic medicine, I can only share my passion and excitement about the speciality and its continuous progress. I believe aesthetic medicine can only offer better and more advanced procedures that are less invasive, with little or no pain and little or no recovery time, as it is made more available and affordable to more in societies across the world. ■



About the author:

Dr Benjamin Yim graduated with a MBBS from Monash University Melbourne. He then went on to attain his Diploma in Practical Dermatology from the University of Wales in 1998 and then a Masters of Science degree in Clinical Dermatology from the University of London in 1999. He is a member of Dermatology Society of Singapore, the Aesthetic Society of Singapore and a Fellow of the American Academy of Dermatology (USA).

