



AESTHETIC MEDICINE AND THE AESTHETIC CONSULTANT

The **Importance** of **Knowing Who Is Recommending** and **Facilitating** Your **Treatment** Options

BY WAYNE WERTHEIM, M.D.

In an attempt to initiate the self-regulation of the industry an organization called The Aesthetic Practice Association (TAPA) has stepped up to the call

It is not a surprising fact that the field of aesthetic medicine is seeing more and more patients/clients on an annual basis. This has become one of the fastest growing fields in medicine. With exponential growth comes some confusion about exactly what aesthetic medicine is, and with many new players hoping to take advantage of this market, it is important to know who is making the recommendations for your treatments.

Essentially the field of aesthetic or cosmetic medicine involves the treating of non-disease issues, primarily of the skin, and the overall cosmetic appearance of patients, utilizing "non" and/or "minimally" invasive procedures. Usually this practice includes procedures such as laser therapies, chemical peels, injectable fillers (i.e., Juvederm, Restylane), neuromodulator injections (i.e., Botox, Dysport), mesotherapy, liposuction, and spider vein removal, just to mention a few. This contrasts to the general practice of dermatology, which focuses on abnormal and

disease issues of the skin; and plastic surgery, which specializes in very detailed invasive surgery to yield a desired cosmetic effect. Both these specialties usually also perform aesthetic medical services as an adjunct to their primary services.

The aesthetic office should present itself as a medical office yet have a non-clinical feel. This allows their clients to feel confident that they are in good medical hands, yet relaxed in an environment that is not catering to disease states. The office should meet medical standards of being immaculately clean, well run, professionally attired staff, and also extend premier customer service.

The quality of the aesthetic office is set by the physician medical director in charge. Any licensed medical doctor can serve as a physician, so it is important to find out who the director is, what his/her training is in the field, whether or not this is their full-time practice, if they are there only certain days, who will see you if there is a problem, and most importantly, where exactly the physician is. Believe it or not some directors are on paper only; they do not participate in the daily operations of the center (they may have practices miles away or even out of state!).

We generally go on the assumption that the procedures recommended and advice given by the physician during their consultation is based on their training, education, experience, and ethical desire to help the patient. However, in the aesthetic medicine office the

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physician may not be the one doing the consult and recommending your treatments. Usually it's an employee that greets the clients, performs the evaluation and consultation, recommends therapies, and may perform the noninvasive procedures.

Right now there are no official criteria that specify who can perform the consultation. Some considerations when meeting with your consultant are their training, educational background, what review is performed (by the physician) to their recommendations, and whether they have passed any proficiency testing to receive a certificate in their field. Remember that noninvasive

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does not equate to safe. These centers use medical grade lasers and chemicals that are potentially dangerous and can leave long-term adverse effects if not performed by qualified, professional staff on intelligently selected, appropriate candidates by the consultant.

In an attempt to initiate the self-regulation of the industry an organization called The Aesthetic Practice Association (TAPA) has stepped up to the call. In their own words they are "a community of physicians, aesthetic extenders, and office staff devoted to enterprise growth and professional development. The vision of TAPA is to be the leading association for the education and training of aesthetic practitioners worldwide, by offering an exceptional certification program that creates successful and competent leaders who follow ethical business practices."

Though the organization is still in its infancy it has thousands of members already. One of TAPA's first projects was to develop and launch the Certified Aesthetic Consultant (CAC) certificate course. In a survey of more than 2,000 TAPA member respondents identified the need for increased staff training as a critical challenge. The CAC program is the industry's first systematic, comprehensive approach to helping staff members gain core competencies in areas that are critical for practice success and patient satisfaction. An individual who has mastered the art, science, and business of medical aesthetic practice management and patient consultation is a person in high demand.

To certify as a CAC applicants must complete a syllabus of online courses that includes four major areas of necessary competence: basic science, consultation and client service skills, marketing principles, and effective business practices. At the completion of the syllabus the applicants must take a comprehensive 100-question exam and achieve a score of 80% or higher to become certified.

The CAC program is a healthy start to providing a higher level of safety and excellence to the public seeking aesthetic care. It sets serious aesthetic medicine practices apart from those that may be entrepreneurial ventures that may be more concerned with profit margins than customer service, excellence in outcomes, and generally accepted professional medical ethics and standards. So as you enter the exciting world of aesthetic medicine consider, for your safety and excellence of care, look for an office that adheres to higher standards, certifying and employing Certified Aesthetic Consultants.

The author, Wayne Wertheim, M.D., is the full-time medical director of Advanced Laser of Long Island located in Roslyn, New York. His office is one of the first in the country to have their full staff participate in both TAPA and the CAC program.

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