



Managing the Aesthetics of Your Practice When Image Is Everything

by Wendy Lewis



Building a successful aesthetics practice has a lot to do with promoting the right image. Every facet of your brand should be consistent and convey a clear message that resonates with the target consumers you want to reach. This can vary greatly from one market to the next. It is paramount to pay attention to every detail; savvy cosmetic consumers will judge you based on their total experience in your practice.

Whether you are planning a brand new office or embarking on renovating your existing office, getting the layout and the aesthetics right are critical issues. The cosmetic appearance of your facility affects how patients perceive you and your practice. Attention must be paid to choosing a facility of ample size and space, the best location, additional amenities, parking and convenience to public transportation. If your plan is to build an accredited surgical facility, long before you choose a facility and begin the design process you will need to be well informed about the requirements of the leading accreditation organizations, including aaaasf.org, aaahc.org, and jcaho.org. If you require operating room time, and cannot afford to build your own surgical

facility, it may be worth exploring potential opportunities in your community to rent or share OR space in an accredited facility.

Waiting room and reception area layouts are critical facets of a cosmetic practice. Decisions regarding lighting, appropriate seating, tables, window treatments, and wall coverings will set the tone for patient visits. Noise characteristics from street traffic as well as hallways and treatment rooms should be minimized as much as possible to promote a plush and relaxing ambiance. Similarly, if your staff likes to play music while patients are in the office, it should be soothing and non-taste specific. Seating should be comfortable and varied; for example, a selection of armchairs as well as loveseats, or a larger sofa, offer the best mix for patients who may arrive alone, in pairs or in groups on occasion.

Think about which reading materials and information will be available in your waiting room. No other public area provides an opportunity to reach such a large, captive audience. While your clients are waiting for their appointments, keep them entertained while you educate them about other services that you offer with flatscreen video reels, brochures, books of photos, and press clips. Although current glossy magazines offer a nice distraction for patients, they do not reinforce your brand or services. Company

literature about individual treatments and products should be attractively displayed with your practice logo and contact information. Some type of personalized practice information in the form of a pamphlet, menu of services, instruction sheets, bios of medical staff, and photos of your results are a welcome addition.

Privacy is also a vital issue for constructing your waiting room and patient areas. Whenever possible, the cosmetic coordinator and nurse of the practice should have a private area to discuss fees and procedures with patients out of earshot of the waiting room. Sound barriers of some form are essential to avoid violating HIPAA regulations in many facilities. If you have aestheticians on staff, you might consider designating an area of the facility for spa and skincare services.

If you are just building your aesthetic practice, you will be in a better position to control many of the construction and layout factors than someone who has already established an office. Careful planning of every minute detail of your office in the early stages can save you a bundle in terms of money, time and stress down the road. Moving or expanding a practice can be highly disruptive to servicing patients, and you can run the risk of losing patients if the process is too lengthy or complex.

Be sure to consider possible layouts with a professional architect when evaluating potential office sites. Clustering exam rooms in close proximity can cut down on the time spent hopping between rooms, and can increase productivity. Streamlined floorplans are the most practical way to minimize patient confusion and increase staff efficiency. For example, the route from a treatment room to the front desk, to make a payment or schedule an appointment, should be simple and direct to avoid patients getting lost along the way. Besides allowing for which layout will be most effective for your staff, imagine what your office layout and atmosphere will convey to your patients.

Take a bird's-eye view of patient flow and comfort based on the demographics of the patient population you are targeting. Your menu of services and how you are delivering these services will also factor into designing a layout and image that will be most effective. For example, if you plan to add a retail vertical, adding cabinetry and attractive shelving for displays will make your skincare and cosmetic products look more appealing. Space constraints often pose a huge challenge for cosmetic practitioners, especially in urban areas where 1,000 square feet may be deemed palatial. Storage for patient charts, product inventory, and supplies is always at a premium. Lasers and light-based devices also take up a lot of floor and countertop space—they may need to be moved from room to room as needed.

Signage is another topic that requires an aesthetic approach. To connote the feeling of elegance and exclusivity, door signage, front desk, patient areas and wall signage should be appropriately framed and customized. Hand-written signs on copy paper, sloppy labels and otherwise unprofessional-looking notices have no place in a cosmetic practice. Cleanliness is also paramount, especially in high-traffic areas where patients tend to congregate. It may be helpful to assign one staff member to check the waiting room and patient bathrooms throughout the day to make sure they are tidy and neat at all times.

Sharing office space has become extremely common in this economy as a cost-saving measure. Seeking out an office where the tone

and aesthetics meet your own practice requirements may narrow your options considerably. Moving around from one location to another in a short period of time negatively affects your credibility with patients. If you are committed to growing your cosmetic practice, only choose to share space with a like-minded practitioner where there may be opportunities for cross pollination of patients. Cohabiting an office can be likened to choosing a college roommate. If you and your staff are simpatico with your roommate, the experience can be extremely rewarding and cost effective. However, if your attitude towards patients and commitment to aesthetics is not on the same plane, friction and petty jealousies may arise that make it impossible to share space in the long term.

Finally, your image and the image of your staff also affect patients' experience in your practice. Freshly laundered lab coats and scrubs embroidered with the practice name add a nice touch. Patient gowns should be made of cloth, not paper, to convey an air of pampering. Sometimes the smallest personal touches can have the most impact for patients. For example, providing pretty hand mirrors in all treatment and exam rooms or having fresh flowers in the waiting room every week sends the message that your patients are in the right place. ■

THINGS TO AVOID:

- FAUX FLOWER ARRANGEMENTS OR PLANTS
- MAGAZINES THAT ARE MORE THAN ONE MONTH OLD
- SOAP OPERAS OR DAYTIME TALK SHOWS AIRING ON WAITING ROOM TELEVISION
- DUSTY OR DIRTY SKINCARE TESTERS
- CRACKED OR BROKEN LUCITE LITERATURE DISPLAYS
- STAINED UPHOLSTERY OR DRAPES
- FRAYED RUGS OR WORN CARPET
- OVERFLOWING SHARPS CONTAINERS IN EXAM ROOMS

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