

PLASTIC SURGERY PRACTICE

The Life and Legacy of the Baron of Botox: Wendy Lewis and Others Remember the Life and Times of Frederick Brandt

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By Wendy Lewis

News of the tragic and untimely death of dermatologist Fredric Brandt on Easter Sunday April 5, 2015, shocked the medical community around the world, and with good reason. Many of his colleagues and friends had just seen him at The American Academy of Dermatology meeting in San Francisco, looking chipper and with his entourage like the rock star he was. No one imagined that it would be the last time they saw his famous face.

Ask his colleagues and staff about “The Man Behind The Face,” as New York Times reporter Guy Trebay titled his candid portrait of Fred 1 year ago, and they will use words like generous, kind, giving, caring, sweet, funny, and talented.

“I had the privilege of working with my good friend Dr Fred Brandt for 20 years in our New York City practice at the Laser & Skin Surgery Center of New York. Fred was a brilliant physician with extensive knowledge of dermatology and medicine. He was an extremely creative cosmetic dermatologist whose work with Botox and injectable fillers helped change how many physicians approach the aging face. He was known, not only for his artistry as a physician, but also for his sense of humor, compassion, and commitment to his patients. Fred’s contribution to cosmetic medicine has been transformative and noteworthy,” says New York City dermatologist Roy G. Geronemus, MD.

“I am profoundly saddened by Fred’s sudden death. He has been my trusted friend and colleague for over 2 decades. In addition to his contributions to drive innovations in the field of cosmetic dermatology, he was a man of generous spirit. I will cherish special memories of our many shared personal and professional experiences over the years. He has left a significant void in our professional community that will be felt for many years to come,” says Washington, DC-based dermatologist Tina Alster, MD.

“Seeing Fred Brandt for your injections was a status symbol akin to carrying a Birkin, joining the right club, and having a driver.” —Wendy Lewis



The Celebrity Factor

For a self-described Jewish kid from Newark, NJ, who came from very humble beginnings, Fredric Sheldon Brandt rapidly rose to the top of his game. Unlike many of his most revered colleagues, he didn't have an Ivy League education. In fact, he went to Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ, as an undergrad and Hannehman Medical College in Philadelphia for his MD. Yet he built the Dermatology Research Institute in Coral Gables, Fla, into one of the leading dermatological research centers in the US, where he and his research team performed clinical trials for pharmaceutical and medical device companies.

The name Fred Brandt became synonymous with "celebrity dermatologist," most notably due to a comment made by Madonna crediting him with how young she looked. There was gossip about how she would fly him to London in her private jet to do her injections. Other famous names he has been linked to include hairstylists Oribe Canales and Garren DeFazio, journalist Laurin Sydney, and a long list of the beauty media elite.

Personal Recollections

I recall visiting him in New York one time, and he was running late because his last patient brought her mother along, unbeknownst to Fred. He came out of the room to apologize to me, and asked if I had ever heard of (blank). She was claiming to be an actress and wanted a discount for herself and her mother on injections. I recognized the name right away as an actress on a cable crime series, although not exactly Oscar material. He treated her and gave her the discount anyway. Fred was that kind of doctor.

His fees were very high, falling under the category of, "If you have to ask the price, you can't afford it." A patient could easily walk out with a bill for injections and laser treatments that rivaled a top plastic surgeon's facelift fee. In his defense, he did spend a lot of time with his patients and really got to know them, which is why they kept coming back, even though they could have their BOTOX® and fillers from someone else at half the price. He became a trusted confidant to many of his patients that went beyond a semi-annual visit for a cosmetic tune-up. Seeing Fred Brandt for your injections was a status symbol akin to carrying a Birkin, joining the right club, and having a driver.

But he didn't just treat the Park Avenue and Palm Beach ladies who lunch. On the contrary, people flocked to pay his \$500 consultation fee from all corners of the world, even just to get the benefit of his artistic eye and then go back home to someone local. No one can dispute that Brandt was a brilliant injector. He was innovative and pushed the envelope of what could be achieved short of surgery. But he was also a realist and recognized when someone would do better with a nip or a tuck.

"Fred was a real friend. We shared many patients in common, and he genuinely went out of his way to make them all feel special. He treated housewives and colleagues the same way he treated socialites and supermodels. That was what made Fred, Fred," recalls Sam Rizk, MD, a facial plastic surgeon in New York City.

Sarvar Kothavala, vice president marketing-The Americas, Syneron-Candela, relates a poignant experience. "Dr Brandt invited me to his 60th birthday party. I imagined it would be a fancy do and told him I wasn't too excited to have to dress up after a long flight from my home in San Francisco. He told me not to bother and to come as is because it was all family. I was surprised to see a large group of people, most of whom I did not recognize, chatting in Spanish in a familial manner. They seemed very comfortable in his home, exhibiting a very loving sense of ownership over him as they watched over his presents, cleaned up spills, etc. I learned that this group was who he considered his family; his housekeeper, his assistants, their families, and the lady who cleaned his first office (whose family he educated)."

She continues, "Behind that genius, whimsical exterior was truly the gentlest and humblest of human beings – one who never cared about what you could do for him or what you owned. He cared about what you stood

for and the human being you were. We have so many lessons to learn from the truthfulness with which he lived his life.”

An Aesthetics Empire

Brandt was instrumental in making BOTOX® as well as Restylane® household names, having conducted clinical trials for both brands and being among the biggest users of these products in the free world.

“Fred was among the most prolific contributors to the world of aesthetic dermatology. His development of noninvasive techniques with dermal fillers and neurotoxins literally created some of the most important categories in modern aesthetics. Fred was a great and kind friend, and was deeply respected by colleagues and patients worldwide. His loss to our community is gigantic,” says Jonah Shacknai, who was the founder, and formerly served as chairman of the board and chief executive officer, of Medicis Pharmaceutical Corp.

“As a great innovator, Fred’s Brandt’s ability to blend science, medicine, and art led to his success as the most internationally recognized dermatologist. His ability to connect and care for his patients was very special since he made everyone feel important. He was a good friend, always caring, always concerned about those who were closest to him. He will be deeply missed by all, but especially those who knew him best for the true person he was. I am so sad that my friend is gone, and all I can hope is he is at peace,” says Richard Bankowski, field clinical director, Cynosure.

Brandt’s first book, *AGE-LESS: The Definitive Guide to Botox, Collagen, Lasers, Peels and Other Solutions for Flawless Skin* (Harper Collins, 2002), broke a lot of boundaries. I remember the launch party held at a club in New York. It was an all-white affair, including what the author was wearing, and the book jacket. Everyone in beauty was there. Fast forward to 2013 on the launch of his Sirius XM radio talk show, and there was a cross section of his loyal patients, media, colleagues, and industry veterans from filler and laser companies who flew from across the country to be there to support him.

Touted as the “Skincare Svengali” by *VOGUE*, Brandt embraced his eponymous brand with a passion. His clever names for some of the hero products resonate with his avid followers, such as Do Not Age with dr Brandt™ and Xtend Your Youth®. As serious as he was about medicine and science, he still managed to enjoy the humor of our relentless pursuit of youth. In an interview by two of his famous patients in *Interview*, journalist Jane Holzer and model-turned-actor Stephanie Seymour wrote, “Dr Brandt is a very special individual: Not only can he fix your laugh lines, but he can also give you them.”

I dug up some old articles I wrote that Fred was quoted in, and this comment on the 15th anniversary of BOTOX® Cosmetic seems apropos: “If it moves, my patients want it frozen; if it deflates, they want it filled up; and if it droops, they want it lifted.”

Must Love Dogs

Brandt’s shelter dogs were his pride and joy. Above all of his accolades and achievements, Fred was just a sensitive guy with a big heart who wanted to be loved. And that, he was.

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