



The Rise of Botox Bars, Mall Medspas, And RX Apps: How These Megatrends are Impacting Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons

By Wendy Lewis

Think Alchemy 47, Massage Envy, Ideal Image and ForHers. Like it or not, these disrupters in their respective categories, and many others coming down the pike, present a formidable threat to aesthetic surgery practices.

Here's why.

Dr. Henry Mentz in Houston presented a very clear and compelling status report in 2018 at the New York meeting. He noted that Aesthetic Society members have four enormous challenges ahead. "First, non-boarded aesthetic physicians will vastly surpass boarded plastic surgeons. Second, based on the last twenty-year history, there will be no growth in surgical procedures while the number of non-invasive procedures will nearly double. Third, the number of medspas will double and they will invade the aesthetic surgical space. Fourth, Aesthetic Society plastic surgeons lack the competitive efficiency and economic robustness to compete, build and develop their own surgery centers and comprehensive medspas. These four obstacles create challenges to The Aesthetic Society's evolution as the front runners in the business of medical aesthetics," he said.

The Botox-ing of America

The growth of these new models is changing the landscape of medical aesthetics. Gone are the days when patients would wait 4–6 weeks to get into see you for their injections. Today, they want to be seen ASAP, or at least within a reasonable time frame. For example, I searched on Google for "Botox Walk-In Clinic" and multiple locations popped up near my office. The top of the page was owned by Smoothmed—www.smoothmed.com—operated by "board certified physicians." I often say that I can get injected literally without crossing the street by several highly qualified dermatologists and plastic surgeons in my upper east side neighborhood within 24 hours. I am sure the same is true from Beverly Hills to Boca Raton.

The messaging to consumers about everything from minimally invasive injectables to body shaping has also changed. Facilities and chains all over the country are promoting their medical treatments like all other beauty



treatments, often targeting millennials and newbie patients looking for a good deal. Another trend is younger patients in their mid 20s and up who come in for Micro-botox, a quick injection of 5–10 ml just for maintenance. Driven by a desire to prevent wrinkles, they see this as an affordable investment in their future aging, which speaks to their priorities. I met a young art director at a press event and when she found out what I do, she pulled me aside. "Who does your Botox?," she asked after knowing me for 60 seconds. "I go to a spa near me in Brooklyn. They have a nurse who comes in on Saturdays and she's a trainer for Allergan. She charges me \$200 bucks and look!," as she pointed to her perfectly smooth 25-year-old forehead.

Another trend to consider is that these patients are also introducing their virgin moms to aesthetic treatments. They may get their lips injected to look like Kylie, and they may bring their moms in for resurfacing or a threadlift. Some may also bring their boyfriends for acne therapies, laser hair removal, PRP for hair loss, and body fat reduction.

Commoditization of Medical Aesthetics

These trends are not just attracting younger patients. Older women who are plastic surgeons' bread and butter are choosing practices where they can get minimally-invasive treatments when they want them in a fresh, pleasant and appealing environment that makes them feel good about themselves. They are also shopping around—a lot. Just ask Tom Seery, CEO of RealSelf. This is the new normal.

So, what are plastic surgeons to do? Well, you could just pretend this isn't happening and keep doing what you've been doing for years. Or take a closer look at these market shifts, determine how they have manifested in your market and affected your own practice and have a good cry. Or, preferably, find ways to compete on this level without compromising your values, training, ethics, and bank account. It can be done.

I get calls and emails from well-trained talented plastic surgeons that go like this; "Wendy, I need your help. My phone isn't ringing. I'm not busy enough. What should I do?" I also visit many practices where my

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eyes start wandering at the dated art adorning the walls, old fashioned Queen Anne style furniture, chintz draperies, faded Persian rugs, and dark wood. That look is so 1990s now.

Today's patients want a greener environment, open spaces, lighter woods, textures, and colors that speak to health and wellness rather than serious, invasive surgery. They also want the convenience of scheduling online or via an app when they want to be seen, appointment confirmations by text, free Wi-Fi in patient areas, credit cards and Apple Pay, iPads for intake forms, receipts via email, loyalty programs, subscriptions for repetitive services, monthly specials, etc.

Next, it's time to take a good hard look at your logo, website, social channels, and marketing. Are they up to par? Do you have enough staff to manage patients efficiently and perform treatments? Is your image where it needs to be? Are you making it easy for patients to come in when they want to come? Are you maximizing every "lead" that comes across the transom? Do you offer patient financing? Everything counts today if you want to stay busy. These tactics are essential to thrive in aesthetic plastic surgery in 2019.

The Spas are Coming

According to AMSPA's most recent statistics, the top three treatments offered in medical spas are botulinum toxin and fillers, aesthetician services, and laser hair removal. They also note that 77% of all medical spas are in some way affiliated with a physician.¹ The flip side is that 23% of all "medical" spas are NOT affiliated with a physician at all, but do their customers know or even care?

Let's look at Massage Envy, which ranks #5 in spa franchises in the US as of June 2019, with 1176 locations in 49 states across.² Among the brands they feature are Jan Marini Skin Research, Obagi Medical, PCA Skin and Envy Medical, alongside a wide menu of facial and massage offers. Ideal Image offers everything from Kybella to Coolsculpting and Ultherapy. Their facilities are staffed with Medical Directors, MDs and DOs, and PA providers. Consider Sono Bello[®] that has now expanded to over 60 locations; "Our growth is made possible by an amazing team of board-certified plastic surgeons that are now over 125 strong, as well as our entire team of dedicated Sono Bello[®] employees."³

It is only a matter of time before more of these offerings start showing up in your zip code too. But don't get mad; get busy!

This growth of the aesthetics industry among a new crop of non-plastic surgeon providers is a perfect storm. According to Dr. Mentz, "In the next few years, revenues for non-surgical procedures will surpass surgical procedures. This is because there have been a tremendous number of innovations with corporate finance strongly behind the research of devices and pharmaceuticals, and these are non or minimally invasive surgical procedures that work extremely well. Neurotoxins are exceptional for the treatment of animation wrinkles. The smorgasbord of fillers performs well for the correction of deep facial lines, plumping lips, and facial volume restoration. Skin quality is improved with better technology using advances in pulse light and assorted lasers. New contouring devices to reduce fat have been extremely popular. Soft tissue tightening has been improved with new technology in radio frequency, ultrasound and electrical stimulation. Stem cell, fat grafting, PRP, microneedling and other injectable techniques are adding to the mix as well.

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Many of these minimally invasive techniques have been applied to new areas in aesthetic surgery like genital rejuvenation, hair restoration, body and face restoration. These advances have been adopted quickly into the medspa business."

10 Point Action List

1. Keep an open mind to new methods
2. Take your cues from successful service business models
3. Improve the quality of care you offer
4. Add more non-surgical treatments to your menu
5. Hire and train staff to administer some treatments
6. Take better care of VIP loyal patients
7. Keep in touch with patients to stay visible and relevant
8. Spend more on a comprehensive marketing strategy and track results
9. Go to meetings to learn from each other
10. Invest in good employees and send them to meetings too

Think about how to tap into these trends so you don't get left behind. Aesthetic Society members can take advantage of the shifts in the market, if they so desire. It may not be right for everyone, but it will be right for some. Many of the new residents starting out in practice already know this because they live online.

The struggle is real. But it's better to talk openly about this than to pretend it isn't happening. Ignore these trends at your own peril.

Wendy Lewis is President of Wendy Lewis and CO Ltd, www.wendylewisco.com, Editor in Chief of www.beautyinthebag.com, and author of *Aesthetic Clinic Marketing in the Digital Age* (CRC Press, 2018). Her next book, *Growing an Aesthetic Surgery Practice: A Roadmap for Success*, will be published by Thieme in 2020. wl@wlbeauty.com

1. www.americanmedspa.org/page/med-spa-statistics
2. www.franchiserankings.com/profile/massage-envy
3. www.sonobello.com/about-us/why-sono-bello