



INSTA UPDATE: A MUST-READ FOR COSMETIC DOCTORS

The rules are changing before our eyes. Here's what you need to know about the latest changes to Instagram rules.

WITH WENDY LEWIS

Due to reports of negative effects on mental health, especially among adolescents, Instagram (owned by Facebook), is removing all augmented reality filters that depict cosmetic surgery.

In addition, the social media giant is striking all effects from the gallery that are associated with plastic surgery and postponing the approval of new such effects, according to the Spark AR platform, the company behind Instagram's face filters.

In related news, Instagram is restricting people under the age of 18 from seeing posts that promote weight loss products or types of cosmetic surgery. The service will strike down posts that make a miraculous claim about diet or weight loss products as well as those linked to a commercial offer, such as a discount code.

Modern Aesthetics® magazine sat down with social media marketing guru Wendy Lewis, Founder/President of Wendy Lewis & Co. Ltd. and author of 12 books including *Aesthetic Clinic Marketing in the Digital Age*, to discuss these changes and what they may, or may not, mean for your practice.

Will the filtering of filters have any bearing on patient flow?

Wendy Lewis: In my view, this filtering of filters may temporarily annoy younger social media users who will likely figure out ways to get around it if they are so motivated. Snapchat, for example, remains an alternative option. In general, I take a wait-and-see approach to these public service-style announcements from Facebook, as there are

many of them, and often they don't pan out or last long. I have long been skeptical about anything this behemoth media enterprise touts about undertaking for the public good. It seems like more of a PR stunt than a real commitment to change on their part. At the end of the day, Facebook's uber-profitable channels are in business to make money for their investors, and if this stunt stifles growth at all, it will likely drift away as new filters and gadgets continue to arise.

Plastic surgery patients sometimes arrive at consults equipped with a host of filtered photos to communicate their expectations. This has been dubbed "Snapchat dysmorphia." Any thoughts on this phenomenon?

Ms. Lewis: While it may be true that increased use of some social media and photo-editing applications may have fueled an increased acceptance of cosmetic surgery and treatments among Millennials, for the majority of cosmetic surgery patients and aesthetic treatment considerers, I doubt they will pay attention or even care. The younger generations in their 20s and 30s have many other ways available to morph their face and body images and try on everything from hair color, to a new eye shadow, to breast implants. Photoshop and a zillion other photo-editing programs remain in plentiful supply for anyone to significantly edit out flaws or enhance certain features before posting on Insta or Facebook.

Many or most practitioners today offer various photography and imaging systems that are routinely used to

simulate results that can be achieved. New technologies continue to arise, including 3D- to 360-degree imaging and videography platforms that are strong patient education tools as well as tools to sell more procedures.

For naysayers who are anti anything related to cosmetic surgery, banning a few random filters may seem like a small victory. But their long-term goal is to start a bigger conversation about the ideals of beauty and how and why there is a rise in women with low self-esteem or body dysmorphia because they are surrounded by negative body images and messages about women. Despite all the protests we have seen over the years about supermodels being too skinny, the groundbreaking DOVE Campaign for Real Beauty of 2004, and objections to a rise in girls trying to emulate the Kardashian sisters (who don't admit to every tweak they have had done), not much has changed.

What is the take-home message on banning filters?

Ms. Lewis: Don't hang up your scrubs and scalpels just yet. This should not have any significant effects on your patient flow or schedule in the near future. As for non-surgical, minimally invasive procedures, the demand continues to rise year-over-year as new developments enter the market and greater awareness remains in play.

What may blocking posts promoting weight loss products and some cosmetic procedures mean for aesthetic doctors?

Ms. Lewis: Instagram's new policy restricts—and may actually remove—content that promotes weight loss products, fads, and some content about cosmetic procedures to minors. It will impact Facebook users, as well. If you're under 18, you won't see posts in your feed that heavily promote these kinds of treatments or are heavy sales pitches with deals, incentives, discounts, etc. We can partially thank the Kardashians for stimulating this ruling, because they have made some of their fortune on promoting slimming, diets, and other treatments and there has been a backlash.

My understanding is that users are empowered to flag the posts that, in their view, violate these new rules to Instagram.

The new rules seem open to interpretation. What can we expect to see happen?

Ms. Lewis: I imagine that some super aggressive and unethical digital marketing agencies will try to cash in on this rule by flagging competitors of their clients anonymously. You may see certain photos that are flagged and hidden with a label that reads: "Restricted photo. You must be 18 years or older to see this photo." or "The link to this photo or video may be broken or the post may have been removed."

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If that happens, what can a doctor do?

Ms. Lewis: As in other cases, the poster can protest and argue their case, but this takes some time and may not be worth the effort, because it's not simple to get these decisions reversed. You have to make your case compelling. If more than one use reports your content, it may be impossible.

My suggestion would be to take extra caution to avoid getting flagged by considering what your practice is promoting and putting out there. Avoid making anything that could be misconstrued as sweeping claims, and cut back on nudity and graphic photos and videos that may be offensive to some users, especially if you have a large following. Also don't post photos of your kids or anyone else's kids with nudity because those are certain to get flagged first.

As with any platform, like Yelp or Facebook, don't get mad or express your frustration on the platform because that will not help your case. ■