



The Doc Is In

by Steven M. Dayan, MD

Medical Spas ... the Future?

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By now it is a well-recognized fact that the spa industry is in the midst of a major expansion period. Through the 1990s the number of spas sprouting up across the country increased more than 400%. In 1999 the estimated revenues generated by the spa industries were \$5.3 billion. This remarkable income is just below the box office receipts and just above ski resorts on the list of U.S. leisure industries. If that isn't enough, the spa

industry is catapulting into the 21st century with the newest rage, the development of the medical spa. Of the 5,700 estimated U.S. spas, 2.8% are leaping forward and referring to themselves as "medi-spas."

Medical day spas combine the comforting therapies of the traditional spa with recently popularized low risk, minimal downtime medical procedures. Some medical destination spas are further developing with elaborate clinics complete with a staff of physicians, CAT scans and electrocardiograms. While it may be counterintuitive to spend a vacation diagnosing a heart condition, the day spa offer of low-risk, self-enhancing procedures seems more congruent with the current practices.

The scientific community is beginning to realize what estheticians, spa leaders and thousands of years of traditional folklore have declared for years. There are penetrating holistic benefits to non- and minimally invasive treatments. In addition to releasing the negative energies of stress, research is demonstrating the potential physiological improvements gained from spa services such as deep facials, body wraps and massages. Other studies such as those being performed at The University of Illinois are evaluating new methods of delivering already well-established skin-enhancing topical agents to the dermis. Perhaps the benefits of alpha hydroxy and beta hydroxy acids can be enhanced with ultrasound delivery.

As the esthetic field continues to specialize, estheticians are learning more about the deepest layers of the epidermis. In a separate but parallel evolution, physicians are emphasizing treating the individual as a whole and not just as the disease. Today's busy clients are demanding treatments that provide the maximum overall benefits with the least amount of recovery period. Medical science is responding by offering non-aggressive methods of enhancing well-being and improving the skin's condition. It seems that many of these procedures, now routine to a physician office, easily can be performed in a spa. Additionally, the group of patients desiring these procedures often is attracted to the spa environment already. The cost of many of these "lunch time procedures" is approaching that of spa provided services. So combining the services seems like a natural ... right? Well, before you trip over yourself getting started you must recognize "the catch." I'll admit it does seem easy, perhaps too easy. But don't be fooled—it is a very detailed, complex process. In Chicago, I have helped to successfully merge the services but as I learned there is a lot more involved



embarking, you must be pledged to the highest level of professionalism and be committed to unbridled ethical and moral standards. After all parties agree to this promise other mandatory issues such as patient confidentiality and licensing must be addressed. A health care lawyer is a requisite advisor. In general, estheticians seem to enjoy the education, guidance and supervision of a nearby medical professional. However, they need to be careful about being placed into uncomfortable situations. Estheticians may be asked to perform or to refer patients for services that they do not agree with or fully understand. Unsure estheticians should check with their state licensing boards before training on or providing a new service unfamiliar to them. Also, the skeptical estheticians should inquire with a malpractice carrier. They may need to be listed as an additional insured under the supervising physician. One caveat for all involved is that these services are still medical procedures and should be treated as such. A tendency to deprofessionalize the service can occur and you must prevent this from happening. Patient records, compliance with federal, state and local policy and 24-hour physician access are issues that all need to be worked out before promoting services. Additional thorny issues include marketing, accounting and fair financial arrangements.

Yes, I believe medical spas are the future, but the