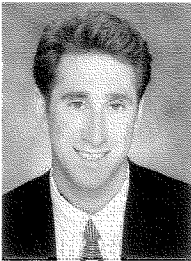


Seminars in Cutaneous Medicine and Surgery

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Introduction

WHAT IS COSMETIC SURGERY? At first glance, the simple answer appears to be: procedures that make people look better. But then come the harder questions, such as who performs cosmetic surgery, what is a cosmetic surgeon, what is the minimum amount of invasiveness required to make a procedure "surgery," and finally who are the cosmetic surgery patients?

In some ways, the answer to the "what is cosmetic surgery" question depends on who you ask. Inter- and intraspecialty disagreements have often dominated the discussion and unfortunately have made it difficult to accurately assess the current field of cosmetic surgery as a whole. Clearly, cosmetic surgery is a multifaceted specialty practiced by physicians from a variety of disciplines. This diversity of cosmetic surgery practitioners has made it difficult to define the field, because by its nature it is broad and evolving. Because of this, a clear definition of cosmetic surgery has, until now, been lacking. It is our intent with this issue of *Seminars in Cutaneous Medicine and Surgery* to give cosmetic surgery a name, a face, an identity, and in so doing help to answer the question: what is cosmetic surgery?

The concept of appearance enhancement has been with us for centuries, but over the latter part of the 20th century surgical procedures to improve the way we look became not only commonplace, but even more importantly socially acceptable. The media and our patients began to talk about surgery to improve appearance in an open and accepting format that previously was unthinkable. Unfortunately, the medical community has in many ways lagged behind the popular press in bringing accurate and ethically sound information about cosmetic surgery not only to the public but also to our colleagues.

Specialties such as dermatology, plastic surgery, facial plastic surgery, anesthesiology, oral and maxillofacial surgery, and oculoplastic surgery have all participated in the academic process of improving surgery to enhance appearance. Yet, the fact that so many diverse groups are involved has made it difficult to provide consistent information to the public and the medical community about cosmetic surgery. The reality is that cosmetic surgery procedures are now safer, more effective, and less invasive than at any time in history; the reason for this is directly linked to the contributions of numerous doctors from a variety of specialties.

It is not easy to learn new procedures, especially when they are elective and cosmetic. Some are complicated and require a great deal of time, effort, and skill to learn and master. Others are not technically difficult to learn, but they can be intimidating, and many of us have spent sleepless

nights thinking about the patient we treated for the first time with a new procedure. This issue is intended to help practitioners from all specialties expand their knowledge and skill in cosmetic surgery. It is through the sharing of information that we as physicians can help to demystify the many nuances of the cosmetic surgery field.

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