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Aesthetic Advancement

ASF uncovers the trends in the cosmetic surgery industry

The trends in cosmetic surgery are on a track of perpetual advancement. New technologies and new studies catalyze procedures with better results and fewer downfalls, and people always are eager to try any new wonder method. It is no surprise that celebrities influence the way the rest of us want to look, but, interestingly, these days patients bring in as many "botch-job" photos for examples of how they don't want to look as they do photos of how they'd like to look post-procedure. Often, cosmetic surgeons warn against these bandwagon procedures, since, in the world of cosmetic surgery, "new" often translates to "barely tested." Dr. Thomas Lintner of Atlanta's Advanced Aesthetic Surgery cautions, "There are always new fads [in plastic surgery], but often these techniques promise more than they can deliver. The best results mean using the tried and true methods." Of course, this doesn't mean remaining in the dark ages; it means waiting for a procedure to be tested (patients have undergone the surgery, healed and maintained the results) before electing to have it yourself.

In the past few years, men have become more comfortable with getting cosmetic procedures. This cultural change has paved the way for one of the industry's newest fads: husband/wife cosmetic surgery. A survey conducted by the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery showed that there has been nearly a 50-percent increase of couples having plastic surgery together in the past year. Talk about romance à la 2008. But couples choosing to have surgery on the same day actually can be both romantic and practical in many ways. Experiencing surgery together is not only an intimate experience, but the idea of improving or preserving oneself for a partner also can be a highly romantic notion. "Undergoing surgery together is a bonding experience," says Dr. Brian Maloney of The Maloney Center in Atlanta. "When couples have surgery on the same day, they have the same recovery period, and experience the process together."

In the technology realm, lasers constantly are being revamped and recreated to produce a superior product. In the last six months, fractionated lasers have been approved and are changing what surgeons can do during laser peel procedures. Previously, a laser peel vaporized an entire layer of skin from the face. While it worked phenomenally well to rid the face of sun spots, fine lines and wrinkles, the recovery time was considerable. New fractionated lasers have changed the procedure forever. Dr. Pradeep Sinha of the Atlanta Institute for Facial Aesthetic Surgery explains that these new lasers allow for the same results with dramatically less downtime. "Instead of vaporizing an entire layer of skin, these newly developed lasers create small tunnels in a polka dot pattern," he says. "They heal within two or three days, but offer the same results." Pixel lasers also are changing options for laser resurfacing. The new lasers are driving the heat deeper into the skin in fewer places, and the results are equal to those of previous lasers, but with less downtime. "The key to these new lasers is that the results are predictable," Sinha says. "They get rid of wrinkles and tighten skin. This new technology will be hitting the mainstream soon, and people will be hearing a lot about these lasers." The other change these fractionated and pixel lasers provide is that a procedure that previously could be performed only on the face now works for hands and necks as well. These parts of the body were unable to heal when the procedure was performed with the previous laser technology, but, with the new lasers, it is now possible.

When it comes to breast augmentation, silicone implants are once again on the rise. After a brief period of these saline alternatives losing their FDA approval (in the early 1990s it was suspected these implants may cause connective tissue disease, but further study concluded this was completely untrue), they are back on the market and quickly regaining their popularity. Although more expensive and slightly more invasive (a bigger incision is required for the silicone implants) than their saline counterparts, the silicone implants feel more natural, which is a huge selling point. According to Lintner, his patients have reported that this "real" feeling isn't just noticeable externally; the silicone feels more like a natural part of the body for patients as well.

Implants today, both saline and silicone, are just as safe as they always have been. While a decade ago the FDA was unsure of any possible side effects associated with breast implants, today, the FDA has concluded that there are no diseases or symptoms linked to either type of implant. So, other than the general risks associated with having surgery, it seems the only known risk of getting implants is the possibility of leakage. Statistically, 1 percent to 2 percent of saline implants leak, and the percentage is even lower for the silicone variety. This leakage is not harmful to the body, and, generally with silicone implants, it is discovered only through a mammogram or MRI. However, with saline implants, a leak will cause deflation, making it easily noticeable. "Although leaking implants don't cause any more disease than intact implants, because they are not functioning as intended, we do recommend you have them removed," Lintner says. "However, this is not an emergency surgery. We usually see leaks in 20- or 30-year-old implants that have undergone some trauma. Trauma can come in the form of a mammogram or a car accident."

At Plastikos Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery, a popular new procedure is a non-surgical face-lift using the Perfector. This device uses highly advanced technology to utilize waveforms and adjustable voltage and deliver a signal to the face's cellular biology. Karen Vaughn, a registered nurse and the administrator at Plastikos, explains that the device looks similar to an ultrasound probe and is rolled around on the skin. "The treatment is actually similar to a facial," she says. "It is very relaxing, and some patients even fall asleep during their treatments." The treatment is performed once a week in a series of seven to 10 sessions. Afterward, patients are advised to continue with monthly maintenance treatments to prolong the results. And these results, although not permanent, are dramatic. After only one treatment, results already can be seen, and the procedures rejuvenate the face and give it a healthy, natural glow. Vaughn says Plastikos patients are raving about the healthy radiance the procedure delivers.

Vaginal rejuvenation and cosmetic vaginal surgery are continuing to gain popularity in Atlanta and across the nation. Women increasingly are interested in the surgeries for both cosmetic and functional reasons. "Starting four or five years ago after vaginal rejuvenation surgery received press on shows like Dr. 90210 and in women's magazines, women started asking for vaginal cosmetic surgery and tightening procedures for sexual enhancement after vaginal childbirth," says Dr. Robert Moore of Atlanta Urogynecology Associates and the

Atlanta Vaginal Rejuvenation & Cosmetic Surgery Center. "However, I find that there is a lot of confusion about vaginal cosmetic surgery. Surgery on the outside of the vagina can encompass every part of the vagina, including reduction labiaplasty (surgical reduction of the labia minora and associated excess skin around the clitoris), augmentation labiaplasty, and aesthetic reconstruction or enhancement of the vulvar structures on the outside of the vagina to improve the external appearance of the vaginal area or make it look more youthful. These surgeries are performed for both functional and visual reasons. Often, women have labia that are so enlarged it causes discomfort during exercise, intercourse or even daily functions. On the appearance side of things, now that the surgeries are receiving publicity, I have women come in for consultations who have felt like here was something wrong with their body since puberty, but doctors have laughed it off and told them they were being overly sensitive. We know that genital self-image has a large impact on a woman's self-confidence and sexual well-being, and they want this part of their body to look good, just like any other part."

While many women elect to have the cosmetic surgery due to appearance issues or insecurities, often there are functional difficulties that motivate a woman's choice. At Atlanta Urogynecology Associates, Moore and his partner, Dr. John Miklos, perform these surgeries on women as young as 16 years old, who are experiencing functional difficulties in their daily activities. Enlarged labia can cause both pain and embarrassment for young athletes and, with a greater acceptance of these procedures, there is now relief for their plight. It is easy to imagine the intricacy and skill that must go into surgical procedures on such a highly sensitive area of the body. "While we use a laser in many instances, we also use other tools like high energy pinpoint cutting sources and microcutting instruments," Moore says. "It is not the laser that creates the aesthetic appearance, it is the surgeon. While there are some procedures that a laser may be used by itself to treat the area, this isn't one of them. These are intricate, delicate surgical procedures that require expertise and artistry."

New surgery techniques also are being developed constantly in the world of cosmetic surgery. The doctors at Plastic Surgery Center of the South specialize in the most up-to-date surgical and non-surgical procedures. One new technique allows facial surgeons to use shorter incisions and operate on deeper facial tissues than previous methods allowed. Since these deeper tissues gradually lose their tone and elasticity during aging, this new operational method enables surgeons to directly address an area that was previously inaccessible. "By operating on deeper tissues through smaller incisions, surgeons are able to provide their patients with shorter recovery periods, smaller scars and better results," says Dr. Michael Petrosky of Plastic Surgery Center of the South.

The concept of a "liquid face lift" is also new on the cosmetic surgery scene. Sinha first started performing this procedure more than a year ago, and its recent spotlight on reality television show Dr. 90210 has solidified its place on the new trends scene. Physicians have been using injectibles such as Restylane, Botox and Juvéderm for some time, but this concept actually uses multiple fillers for a combined treatment. Sinha explains the procedure in a systematic fashion with his "3 R's" concept. The relaxation of wrinkles, the restoration of volume and the resurfacing of the skin provide facelift-like results, and the recovery period can be as brief as a weekend. Since these fillers have had such great results, it only makes sense that their combined efforts would provide even greater results. This face lift alternative is also an ideal procedure for those patients who are apprehensive about undergoing a surgical procedure.

Since fillers such as Botox, Restylane and Radiesse provide non-surgical aesthetic enhancement, they continue to maintain their level of popularity. Their non-surgical nature attracts many younger patients and has sparked another trend—the 20-something craze. Now that cosmetic enhancement can be achieved with a simple injection and very little downtime, many younger adults are plumping their lips and smoothing their first signs of aging. "Fillers provide excellent results with virtually no downtime," Petrosky says. "The influx of younger patients attributed to these procedures is only natural!"

While we can't help but be drawn to the excitement of greater results with less downtime for cosmetic surgery and procedures, remember when you go to get these new procedures, or any cosmetic surgery procedure, that they always should be performed by a licensed plastic surgeon or physician. Although many offices have nurses inject Botox or other fillers, it is always safest to have a physician perform any sort of appearance-altering procedure to your body.

The rapidity of technological changes in the cosmetic surgery world keeps the industry ever-changing. Cons to procedures such as downtime and short result periods quickly are being eliminated. One day will the naysayers' tongue-in-cheek concept of "drive through" plastic surgery become a reality? Check back with us in a year, and we'll let you know.

Advanced Aesthetic Surgery

Dr. Thomas Lintner

Two locations (Marietta and Woodstock)

770.771.5151

tomlintnermd.com

The Maloney Center for

Facial Plastic Surgery

Dr. Brian Maloney

6111 Peachtree Dunwoody Road

Building E, Suite 201

770.804.0007

maloneycenter.com

Atlanta Institute for

Facial Aesthetic Surgery