



Aesthetic medicine, a positive pandemonium- Who owns it?

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The popularity of "Aesthetic Medicine" has soared over the last two decades. Though cosmetic procedures originally emanated from developed countries like the US and the UK, it has become widely popular in Asian countries like China, South Korea, Thailand and India in the last two decades.¹ Considering beauty as an essential ingredient of well-being, aesthetic medicine is the fastest-growing healthcare domain worldwide.

Aesthetic medicine is a field of modern medicine dealing with individuals seeking enhancement of their appearance. The aesthetic concerns are broadly classified as follows:

1. Primary concerns: occurring merely as a perception of their appearance. For example, skin tags, skin laxity, aging skin, wrinkles, cellulite, or body fat.
2. Secondary concerns: occurs as a complication to any pathological or surgical problem. For example, acne scarring following acne, hair growth on the face due to hormonal imbalance, or a scar following surgery.

Cosmetic concerns could be managed with cosmeceuticals (not necessarily prescription products), medical-grade procedures, or surgical procedures. Thus, undoubtedly, medical professionals form the core of aesthetic medicine, as they possess all the necessary medical knowledge and professional skills to handle patients with various medical disorders (both acute and chronic).

At the outset, let us make it clear that we are not discussing "aesthetic surgery" or 'cosmetic surgery,' as it involves cutting and suturing, which falls under the plastic surgery domain. However, in "aesthetic medicine," the treatment options are more often than less, low-risk, no sedation involved, minimally-invasive and less expensive. Thus, making it extremely popular among the public seeking non-surgical aesthetic treatment. After all, who does not like to appear appealing? However, aesthetic medicine is passing through an identity crisis and an ethical dilemma. It is often considered a business aimed at a profit rather than benefiting patients as a much-needed service.

Similarly, social media and marketing tactics to promote one's aesthetic practice make it more of a business guided by market structure.

We have to make it clear here that the decision to undergo a cosmetic treatment is a personal choice of the patient rather than a medical necessity. Thus, nowhere in the world is aesthetic medicine included in government institutes and hospitals. Similarly, nowhere in the world is the science of beauty in the medical curriculum because "Allopathic medicine" means mainstream medical practices like providing prescription drugs or surgery to treat diseases. Most aesthetic services and procedures are not backed by long-term scientific evidence. Thus it is often considered a deviation from modern medicine's conventional practice.

There is an extended dilemma, if aesthetic medicine is simply a frivolous specialty or a specialty aiming to heal patients. However, aesthetic medicine is maintaining its upward trajectory, expanding its horizon into technology-based devices like ultrasound, lasers, radio-frequency, and minimally invasive medical-grade injectables like botulinum toxin and fillers to enhance one's cosmetic appearance. There have been various advancements in facial sculpting and bio-remodeling products recently.

Medical professionals require additional knowledge of applying these approaches in managing patients with aesthetic concerns, coupled with an artistic instinct to enhance the cosmetic appearance of an individual. The term "cosmetology doctor," "aesthetic medicine doctor," "aesthetic or cosmetic physician," "aesthetic doctor," or "cosmetic doctor" are standard terms used worldwide for a modern medicine physician who manages cosmetic concerns. Aesthetic medicine is gaining popularity among medical professionals for the following reasons:

1. A career in aesthetics is an excellent complement to their existing medical knowledge.
2. Creating a reputable aesthetic clinic as a supplementary career choice is increasing among doctors. The satisfaction of running



their practice is one of the top reasons for medical professionals choosing to enter this industry.

3. There is a growing demand for aesthetic treatments year after year, and the demand for trained medical professionals is also increasing. There is no secret that the rewarding salary makes it a preferable career choice for many doctors.
4. Aesthetics is an ever-advancing field and switching careers or choosing this over conventional medicine could be refreshing for someone who has spent most of their life in hospitals, treating many patients.
5. This field offers a more desirable work-life balance and flexibility, and it is less stressful and most often does not involve emergencies.

Beauty and wellness overlap with different spheres of health like skin, body, weight, nutrition and psychology. Thus, aesthetic medicine overlaps with various medical specialties and this field can be approached through multiple medical disciplines. However, the medical professional would require additional training in aesthetic medicine, as aesthetic science is not a part of the medical curriculum and doctors need new skills to manage cosmetic concerns, especially antiaging. With aesthetic medicine gaining momentum and considering it a good discipline, every doctor aims to have a career in it. Many dermatologists have shifted their practice solely to aesthetics practice recently, as it overlaps well with their specialty.

Considering aesthetic medicine as a new-found medical arena, a multidisciplinary team or a team-based approach is often required to address the aesthetic need of an individual. For example, concerns like skin dullness, open pores, fine lines and wrinkles could be treated with topical medications and procedures like chemical peels or microdermabrasion by medical professionals, like general medical practitioners or family medicine physicians. Similarly, injectables like Botox and fillers for antiaging need an understanding of facial anatomy, which medical professionals acquire at the beginning of their medical careers. It is a worthwhile option for someone trained in Anatomy to become an aesthetic injector alongside being an anatomy faculty. However, a surgeon's intervention is recommended if someone seeks a surgical procedure beyond medications and non-invasive procedures. For example, when a plastic surgeon or a dermatologist is involved in hair transplantation surgery. Similarly, a gynecologist is involved in the rejuvenation of female genitalia. Thus, like any other medical specialty in

healthcare, aesthetic care could start with a general practitioner and extend to a specialist treatment like surgery, depending on the problem and the procedure needed to treat the concern.

What does this mean for the new doctors and retired physicians? They can have a lucrative career in aesthetic medicine if they are interested in the science of beauty and antiaging. They can do fellowship courses conducted worldwide, get trained by dermatologists to understand the basic skin sciences or attend classes taught by companies dealing with technology-based devices to apply them in managing cosmetic concerns.

What does this mean for the Indian Medical regulatory authority? Proper structured training and accreditation are required for medical doctors pursuing aesthetics as a career. Like any other medical treatment, the guiding principle for aesthetic medical services should be:

- 1) "Safety first"
- 2) Aim for a positive outcome for the clients.
- 3) Adopt a multidisciplinary approach and appropriate referrals when needed for better results.

What does this mean for individuals looking out for cosmetic care? Individuals should seek medical professionals' help for cosmetic issues like any health condition. They can choose their physician depending on their aesthetic training and experience. Individuals should trust medical professionals for such procedures rather than untrained aestheticians like spas, salons, or skin influencers.

With an increasing demand for social aesthetics, aesthetic medicine will continue to be an exciting medical discipline for medical professionals. Physicians can play it to their strengths to use this prosperous era of the aesthetic industry. While some do not consider aesthetic medicine a discipline of clinical medicine, many aesthetic medical doctors feel that it adds a variety to their already existing careers. Thus, like preventive medicine, rehabilitation medicine, or nutritional medicine, aesthetic medicine should be considered an accompanying medical discipline to confer healthy and safe beauty-enhancing services to individuals seeking it.

1. Goh C. The need for evidence-based aesthetic dermatology practice. *J Cutan Aesthet Surg*. 2009 Jul;2(2):65-71. doi: 10.4103/0974-2077.58518. PMID: 20808593; PMCID: PMC2918343.