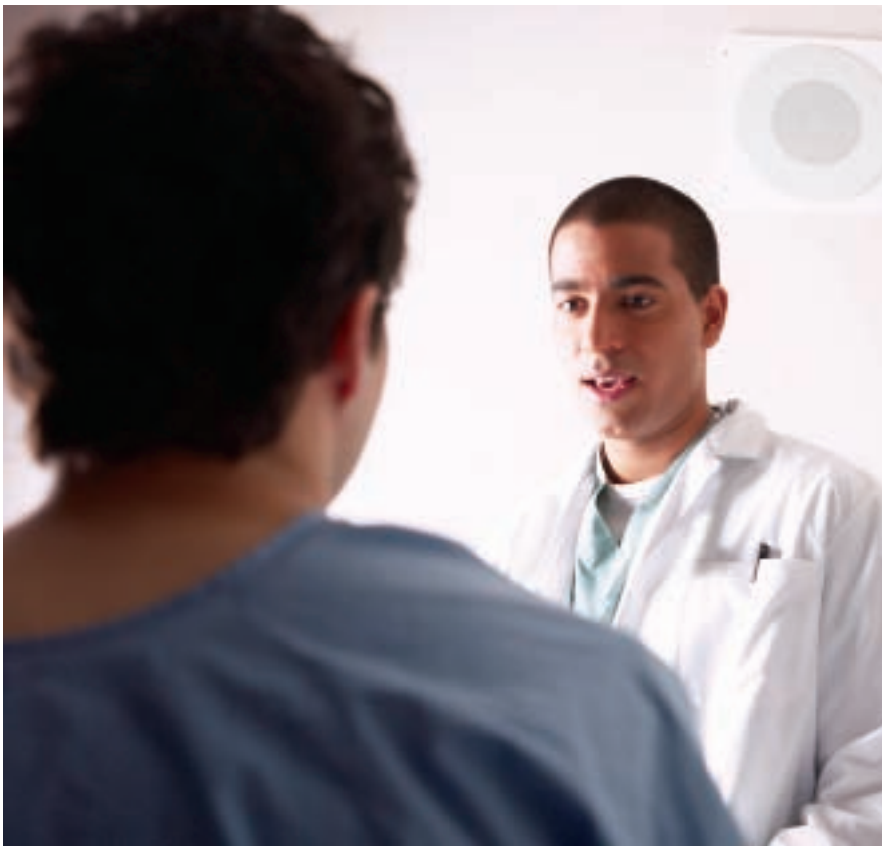


# COSMETIC Clinic



## Fauxtox Repercussions

BY KENNETH BEER, M.D.



**A** little more than a year has passed since an unlicensed osteopathic physician in Florida injected himself and three others with industrial-grade botulinum toxin. The patients involved have made a recovery that is not complete, though they have done remarkably well. Injections of Botox Cosmetic, which were stalled for several months following this incident, have also made a comeback. But, many patients do view Botox differently now and have more questions than ever. This incident has affected the world of cosmetic dermatology and the practice of treating patients with Botox.

### CONCERNS FOR SAFETY

While the number of patients receiving Botox is growing, I think we've lost quite a few potential candidates. One major fallout from the incident is that a large number of potential patients are now convinced that Botox is poisonous, despite efforts by numerous physicians and medical organizations to educate the public regarding the total disconnect between the injection of a counterfeit product by an unlicensed osteopathic physician and the injection of an FDA-approved product by a physician. No matter how many discussions have occurred in physician offices, patients still remember the sensational headlines about Botox poisoning people, particularly here in Florida.

Not surprisingly, once it was discovered that it was not Botox that was the culprit, reporting basically ceased and most people only remember the sensational, if inaccurate, headlines. I think that there are people that were contemplating Botox treatments that are now permanently scared. This is a shame because they are missing out on one of the safest and most efficacious treatments in the cosmetic world. Since Botox treatments have been linked with improved self esteem and are frequently associated with other cosmetic treatments, these patients are losing out on a host of procedures that are relatively low-cost, low-risk and high-satisfaction procedures.

### LOOKING TO ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS

Another major repercussion from the Botox scare is that there are patients that now purchase the various creams that are advertising themselves as Botox alternatives instead of looking into Botox treatment. A controlled clinical trial compared these creams with Botox Cosmetic and found that the creams were similar in efficacy to placebo in most aspects. Despite this, patients are spending hundreds of millions of dollars on these products. While this is not the end of the world, it is a shame that they are spending limited financial resources on things that may not work as well as Botox simply because of unfounded and irrational fears.

Physicians and other individuals in the esthetic marketplace are now adapting to

misplaced patient fears by using alternate modalities to address patient concerns. In some areas of the face, patients who should have been injected with Botox are now being treated with radiofrequency or fillers. While each of these has their place, they are typically best used as adjuncts for glabellar and periorcular rhytids instead of substitutes for Botox.

### REPUTATION AND TRAINING MATTER

In my practice, the major repercussion of the bootleg botulinum injections has been time: I now have to spend a great deal of time discussing the difference between what I do (and have done since 1998) and what others in my area have done and, in some instances continue to do. Most of my patients know my training and reputation and simply ask me to treat them as I see fit. My patients do not know that I am injecting 25 or 50 units of material purchased from Allergan, but because they trust my training and reputation they trust that I am putting their health and best interest first.

Perhaps this is a benefit of the coun-

terfeit Botox fiasco. Patients now have a vague sense that reputation and training matter. Spending \$200 to have a product of unclear pedigree injected by someone with an unclear degree rather than a trained dermatologist is now less important to intelligent people than obtaining a safe and effective outcome. In short, there is a flight to quality. Seeing four people on ventilators changed the way that patients perceive cosmetic procedures. This flight to quality should be good for ethical physicians who have always done what they thought was best for their patients as well as their reputations.

### EDUCATING PATIENTS

We still get calls price shopping for the cheapest Botox, Restylane or laser hair removal and I am amazed that people consider this factor more than the safety issue. I fully understand that not all patients have the discretionary incomes that would enable them to write blank checks (that will clear) in order to get cosmetic procedures per-

formed. But, following the numerous instances of scarring from lasers, poisonings from counterfeit products and injections of impure silicone, it is time to educate these people on the difference between value and price.

One pathway that needs to be pursued is a collaboration between industry and the professional organizations to educate patients and prospective patients about the qualifications of the physician injecting them and the pedigree of products being injected. This would benefit patients, physicians and industry alike and would represent the first time that such a consortium came into being for the benefit of these interests. ■

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**Disclosure:** Dr. Beer has no conflict of interest with this month's column.

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