

COSMETIC Clinic



Targeting Teens?

BY KENNETH BEER, M.D.



There may be a huge market for cosmetic procedures that I have overlooked. According to the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery, more than 223,000 cosmetic procedures, including nose reshaping, liposuction and facial skin resurfacing, are performed on patients 18 years of age or younger each year. And, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, there are almost 9,000 Botox procedures performed on people 18 years or younger per year, more than 100,000 chemical peels done for this age group and more than 4,000 filler procedures performed. In dermatology, we are not (to my knowledge) performing breast augmentation, but there seems to be a burgeoning market there as well with almost 4,000 procedures done for women not old enough to drink.

LONGING TO LOOK YOUNGER

I always thought of myself as in the moderate camp for being in favor of most cosmetic procedures, but these statistics strike me as wrong. When I was 18 and younger, I was trying to look older (as were most of my friends). What has changed in the past few decades?

The answer seems to be that we live in a society that has become transfixed with youth and smitten with high-speed solutions. With the Internet, information that would have been difficult to obtain is now in every room with a computer. This access to medical information is leading to more consumers that are interested in cosmetic surgery.

Television is filled with reality shows that show the range of possibilities, limited only by your ability to pay for these procedures. I regularly see these reality shows, but don't know of any shows asking whether a procedure was worthwhile, nor any that ask if they are appropriate for someone in their teens. Certainly, I have not seen any show focusing on complications from cosmetic surgery.

A GREY AREA

Should teens have access to these types of procedures? The answer is not a simple yes or no. Some procedures, such as a rhinoplasty, may improve self-esteem at a critical point in a teen's life. These procedures seem to be worthwhile. Other procedures might correct acne scars or other imperfections that can help a person. I think that these types of procedures should be carefully discussed with the patient and his or her parents or guardian.

Procedures such as Botox, chemical peels and soft tissue augmentation procedures are not, in my opinion, appropriate for these ages. I fail to comprehend how a teen can possibly have incurred enough rhytids to make these procedures worthwhile. More importantly, I do not think teenagers have enough awareness of themselves or their bodies to decide what they do or do not like enough to correct surgically.

BEING RESPONSIBLE

These procedures should not be outlawed, but common sense should

prevail. As a physician that performs cosmetic procedures, I enjoy the gratification that comes with patients happy with their treatments. There are those in the dermatology community that believe that cosmetic dermatologists are akin to snake oil salesmen. Those of us in the cosmetic dermatology community and particularly those in leadership positions should strive to maintain excellence and ethics in the profession. Trying to dissuade teens interested in cosmetic surgery, particularly those that don't need it, will go a long way toward reaching this goal. ■

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

TOP FIVE COSMETIC SURGICAL PROCEDURES FOR PATIENTS AGED 18 AND YOUNGER

PROCEDURE	2004 TOTAL	% CHANGE 2004 VS 2003
Breast augmentation (Augmentation mammoplasty)	3,962	3%
Breast reduction in men (Gynecomastia)	3,631	20%
Ear surgery (Otoplasty)	13,217	-17%
Liposuction	3,250	8%
Nose reshaping (Rhinoplasty)	51,931	22%

**Source: The American Society of Plastic Surgeons*

TOP FIVE MINIMALLY-INVASIVE COSMETIC PROCEDURES FOR PATIENTS AGED 18 AND YOUNGER

PROCEDURE	2004 TOTAL	% CHANGE 2004 VS 2003
Botox	8,978	60%
Chemical Peel	109,052	-14%
Laser hair removal	34,438	-14%
Laser treatment of leg veins	14,484	2734%
Microdermabrasion	68,709	-8%

**Source: The American Society of Plastic Surgeons*

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Or, do you have an idea for a potential article?

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