The Path to Good Outcomes

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For Dr. Cynthia Gregg, a facial plastic surgeon in Cary, the process for change unfolds in a predictable way. First, of highest priority, comes patient education—sharing what is possible and what is desirable, leading to the shared goals that emerge from in-depth conversation. The outcome of this approach is an understanding of a wide array of enhancement possibilities. Dr. Gregg notes—from many different basic skin care services to such comparatively minor procedures and products as Botox, fillers, or laser treatments, to more complex decisions such as facial plastic surgery. As she guides this critical process, Dr. Gregg stresses understanding the best course of treatment to achieve the best outcomes for each individual patient.

MIXED BLESSINGS

“We live at a time when there is in fact unlimited information available to us on the Internet, and from my perspective, that is very much a mixed blessing,” notes Dr. Gregg. “Certainly I believe that knowledge, properly understood and applied, is immensely valuable. Once someone has a diagnosis, for example, they can obtain vast amounts of information that helps them become an active participant in their own treatment and care.

“However,” she warns, “people need to choose with care where they get their information, and they need to be smart about how much emphasis they put on that information. I spend time now with clients assuring them that what they read on the Internet is not always factual, offering instead for their consideration proven medical facts.”

And I know that people come in thinking, ‘But I read about this in the Internet and it must be true!’ But Dr. Web didn’t go to medical school,” Dr. Gregg points out with a smile. “A medical degree, training, experience, and peer-reviewed medical journals are resources that I rely on.”

Dr. Gregg says OTC information can also at times have a negative effect on surgical outcomes. “Clients might come in thinking they know well how to care for themselves because of what they have read on the Internet when I’m attempting to do pre- or post-operative teaching,” she says. “And sometimes what they have read is in direct contradiction to information and guidance I have shared. We are, in effect, sometimes working at cross purposes, and when that occurs, we might be decreasing the chances for an outstanding outcome.”

ACNE SCARRING

“Treatment for acne scarring is an example of this process at work,” Dr. Gregg notes. “Clients will come in having read about CO2 laser resurfacing, which is the gold standard treatment for acne scarring. However it is absolutely not the appropriate treatment for all skin types, and can cause damage to the skin if mis-applied. Darker pigmented skin types are not good candidates for this procedure, for example, because of the increased risk of dyschromia or hypo- or hyper-pigmentation, which negates any benefits we can get from the laser treatment. But people have seen it advertised, and read about the amazing results it can produce, so they come in and are adamant about wanting it. Sometimes,” Dr. Gregg says with a smile, “my most important job is to say no.”

OTC SKIN PRODUCTS

When it comes to over-the-counter products, it turns out the good and the bad are not always as black and white as we might think. “For example,” Dr. Gregg says, “I love Arnica, an OTC homeopathic remedy, and Bromelain, an enzyme found in pineapple that helps decrease swelling and inflammation. Both decrease bleeding and bruising and help speed up healing time post-surgery. And there are some wonderful supplements for the skin such as vitamin C, zinc, and good multivitamins.

“However, there can be some negative consequences to those products at the time of surgery. Vitamin E and Ginkgo Biloba, for example—while both can be great products—will increase bleeding and are not a good choice around the time of surgery.”

In fact, Dr. Gregg has an eight-and-a-half-page list of OTC and prescription medications to avoid two weeks before and two weeks after a surgical procedure—information not likely to be found in an Internet search.

Another category of OTC products that warrant a higher level of scrutiny than we often give them, she notes, are commercial wrinkle creams, face-lift creams, and miracle age-defying creams. “If it sounds too good to be true,” Dr. Gregg says, “you can feel quite certain that, in fact, it is not true.”

Most of the commercial claims made on TV or in print, she explains, “are highly exaggerated because these products are not held to the same level of scientific examination as a product I can use in our clinical practice. “If in fact you are a commercial company mass-marketing an OTC product—skin care or lip plumpers, something anyone can buy—the product has to be made for general use. Meanwhile, in our office, under appropriate medical supervision, we can use products with higher concentrations for a truly targeted customized treatment. And honestly, this approach doesn’t have to cost more than the over-the-counter charge. Some of those products are really expensive.” And it’s true. Some OTC facial creams cost upwards of $100 a bottle.

At the end of the day, Dr. Gregg is a wealth of knowledge when it comes to facial skin treatments and care. “We really have a buffet of options,” she says, “from skin care to surgery.” Within that scope, Dr. Gregg offers in-depth education, Botox, fillers, laser treatments, light therapies, and of course, facial surgery. “But at a minimum,” she says, “I tell everyone to start with sunscreen and good skin care. That’s key. Any surgery I do is going to look better when the client does that first. So it’s really a whole package.”