

No Short Cuts

Cosmetic surgery is a burgeoning industry in the Southland—but there's a lot to consider before you go under the knife.

by John Carey

The way some people talk about movie stars and the amount of cosmetic surgery they undergo, you could get the idea that actors spend all of their time between jobs on surgery tables, and that somewhere there are cosmetic surgeons constructing movie stars entirely from scratch.

The combination of Hollywood gossip as news and the prevalence of actors working as spokesmodels for various fashion and cosmetic products has likely played a role in developing the concept of the vain Hollywood actor who would do anything to maintain an image. This environment seems to have encouraged the newer generation of young Hollywood actors to pay more attention than ever before to their appearance.

To appear the way they want, many actors are going beyond the exercise and diet agenda, and choosing to undergo what can be very risky procedures to change or maintain their physical appearance. This is not necessarily a bad thing; it depends on the individual.

Psychologist Gregory Cason, who has offices in Beverly Hills, said that, "Just because someone is considering surgery does not mean that they have a distorted self-image. But there are definitely people in this town who have a distorted self-image, even to the point that they fall into what is called body dysmorphic disorder."

Under the condition Cason mentioned, a person focuses on one or more of their features so much that their concern becomes greatly exaggerated. As an example, Cason explained, "They may think their nose or hips are much larger than they actually are. They really feel that other people are paying a lot of attention to a certain feature when they actually are not. They see a plastic surgeon in hopes of correcting it. But they actually never feel OK with themselves."

On the other hand, Cason said that, "Some people do benefit when they undergo certain types of physical changes, whether it be a new hair color, or a physical change from cosmetic surgery. If they are just having surgery for a simple desire, because it may help them be happier, or to touch up something that was the result of an accident or birth defect, then that is a little different."

He made an important distinction: "People buy nice clothes, they do their hair in certain ways, they put on makeup—but plastic surgery is a permanent change. And people considering it should be cautious. Some people performing cosmetic surgery are not the most scrupulous types of people." And, he cautioned, "Your looks are something that you can control for only so long, and to a certain degree."

Marketing the New You

Cosmetic surgeons know that there is a large and growing market for cos-

metic surgery, especially as baby boomers age. And to lasso these potential patients in, surgeons are spending an increasing amount of money on advertising. In recent years, these ads have become more bold and direct with the goal of recruiting patients. A rather thin issue of a recent local publication included 10 ads placed by cosmetic surgeons, dermatologists, and dentists peddling cosmetic procedures to make people look younger, thinner, with more hair, more girth, more this way and that way, and with whiter teeth.

Cosmetic surgery was once thought of as only for rich and famous women, but with new technologies, and lower costs, cosmetic surgery is now available to anyone who can find the money or credit to pay for it.

Anyone responding to or being influenced by the promises made in cosmetic surgery ads should keep some things in mind. Above all, that the persuasive information presented in advertising is meant to stress the potential benefits of and satisfaction with a certain product or service. While there may be many successful cosmetic procedures performed, and many satisfied patients, these one-sided ads should not be the deciding factor for anyone undergoing cosmetic surgery.

When you take into consideration that many doctors make lots of money trying to improve upon the unsatisfactory work of other doctors, you can see why someone considering cosmetic surgery should be wary. And on the far side of the spectrum, there have been more than a few cases of people with little or no medical training who have been posing as doctors and performing cosmetic surgery.

Moreover, not to be sensational, but keep in mind that dozens of Americans have died in the last couple of years after undergoing such procedures as liposuction, face lifts, breast implants, penis enlargements, and other cosmetic surgeries. These are, of course, extreme examples. Even so, if you do decide to "go under the knife," there are precautions you can take to ensure some level of safety.

Career Boost or Bust?

There are many things someone should consider before undergoing cosmetic surgery, especially if that person is an actor appearing in front of cameras. When asked what he thought about actors going in for cosmetic surgery, Cal Boyington, an agent at ICM, said, "If a person has obviously had a lot of bad cosmetic surgery, I wouldn't look to represent that person. It is a major flag of insecurity."

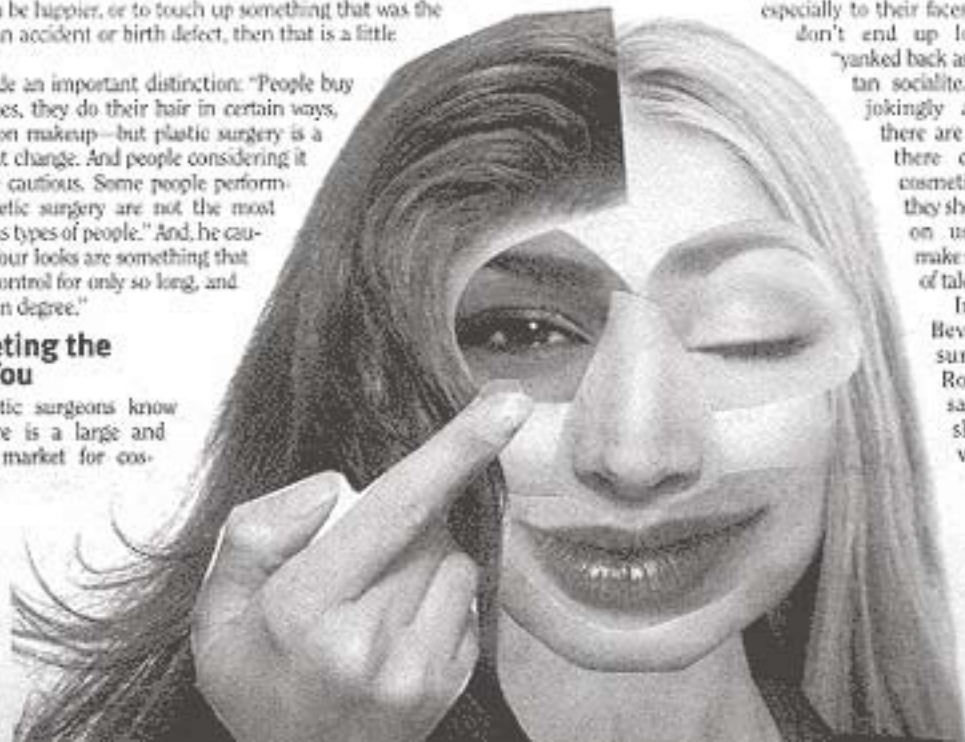
Boyington said that he does not know if any of his clients have undergone cosmetic surgery, but if one were thinking about doing so, he would advise them to "only undergo subtle, minor changes, and not to make their appearance, or cosmetic surgery, an obsession."

Because cosmetic surgery may eliminate quirks and imperfections, Boyington said that he would also advise actors to avoid changing some type of feature that may be "unique to them," and that "may help define their character." He said that actors should

make sure if they do get something done, especially to their faces, that they don't end up looking as

"yanked back as a Manhattan socialite." He half-jokingly added, "If there are actors out there considering cosmetic surgery, they shouldn't plan on using it to make up for a lack of talent."

In addition, Beverly Hills surgeon Dr. Robert Rey said people should be very careful



when choosing what type of change they want, "particularly with nose surgeries. A bad nose surgery can be a career ender." Rey also said people should be cautious about the style of the change. "There are fads in cosmetic surgery, just as there are fads in clothing, hair, and body shapes. For example, the average Miss America of yesteryear had different measurements than the average Miss America of today. With cosmetic surgery, people should try to go for what looks most natural on them, and not for what seems to be the trend of the moment."

Know Who's Handling the Scalpel

If you do decide to undergo cosmetic surgery, one of the more important questions you need to answer is, Who is the person holding the knife?

Just because a doctor says he is "board certified" does not mean he is certified in the area of medicine in which he makes his living. And just because a doctor says he is trained to do the surgery you are considering does not mean he has any experience doing it—you may be his very first customer.

Many people do not know that doctors with a state license can market themselves in any type of specialty they wish. In the cosmetic surgery business, this means there are doctors certified in proctology who are performing breast implant surgery; doctors who are certified in gynecology who are doing face-lifts, and dermatologists who are performing tummy tucks and liposuction. While some of those doctors may succeed in satisfying their patient's wishes, it may be in your best interest to select a doctor who is board certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery, and who specializes in the type of procedure that you want to have done.

Some of the ways a person may find a qualified doctor is to call what is considered to be the best hospital in the area, and ask which doctors are associated with that hospital. Also, a doctor who teaches other doctors how to perform surgery could be a good place to start. This can be done by finding out who the head of plastic surgery is at the local university teaching hospital. If you have insurance, the insurance company handbook may list doctors in each specialty who accept your insurance. Asking other doctors for a referral to the type of doctor you are seeking may be helpful, but they may be referring you only to their friends, and not necessarily to the best doctor for your situation.

There are also a number of ways a person may check up on a doctor. One is to ask for a copy of the doctor's resumé, which should include information about their education, their state medical license, what boards they are certified by, and the name of their medical malpractice insurer.

Calling the state medical board to find out about a doctor should always be done before you let a doctor perform surgery on you. But the state board may not share information about the doctor that is pending. The medical board may tell you if the doctor is in good standing, or if the doctor has had any disciplinary action taken against him. The board may also have information about lawsuits against the doctor. In California, the board may not supply information about malpractice cases in which out-of-court settlements were made, in which the award was less than \$30,000, or in which the malpractice case was heard before an arbitration panel.

You should always make certain the doctor has admitting privileges to a local hospital to perform the surgery that you are going to have. If the local hospital will not let the doctor perform the surgery within its walls, this is a strong indication that you may not want to have the doctor perform surgery on you in an office surgery suite.

Cosmetic Surgery Is a Business

Cosmetic surgery has been the fastest-growing medical specialty for more than two decades. According to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, more than two million Americans underwent cosmetic surgery or non-surgical cosmetic procedures last year. The figures indicate that the field of cosmetic surgery is very lucrative—and therefore very enticing to anyone holding a license to practice medicine. In fact, there are more doctors than ever before who are competing for a share of the cosmetic market. And there are times when the doctors may be driven more by making money than by trying to do what is in the best interest of the patient.

Misleading and deceptive claims can be found in all forms of medical advertising, and many forms of medical treatment are advertised as simple, low-risk, and pain-free when they often are not. It is because of this and other factors covered in this article that anyone considering cosmetic surgery needs to be cautious about who they hire as a cosmetic surgeon.

Whenever people subject themselves to treatment by a medical professional, it should never be assumed the doctor will relay every important piece of information regarding techniques, patient care, and options. The type and quality of medical care patients receive depends in large measure on their taking the initiative to educate themselves, and on asking the right questions

before deciding on any type of medical procedure.

In any situation in which elective surgery is suggested, the final authority on whether the surgery takes place should be none other than a well-informed patient who knows the options, who has had more than one professional opinion, and who understands and has weighed the physical, emotional, and financial risks.

Before You Decide...

Finally, here are some precautions you may decide to take before undergoing cosmetic surgery (from the book *Plastic Surgery Hopscotch: A Resource Guide for Those Considering Cosmetic Surgery* © 1996, John McCabe. Reprinted with permission):

- Keep in mind that open communication between a doctor and a patient is important. Consulting with a professional about performing surgery on your one and only body is not the time to be concerned about making new friends and being entertaining, nor is it a time to be unquestioning and docile. It is a time for you to be assertive and do whatever it takes to find out all your options and have those options explained, get the best information available, seek the best level of communication with the people you speak with, and, if you elect to undergo surgery, seek the best medical care available.
- Contemplate what may be motivating you to surgically alter your appearance: Are you planning to undergo the surgery in preparation for some event or reunion? Do you believe the surgery is going to change your life and will be some type of detour to success? Are you considering the surgery to compensate for a failed relationship or other life disappointment?
- Talk to your close friends or family about your ideas of undergoing cosmetic surgery.
- Make a list of the pros and cons of why you should, and should not, have the surgery.
- Bring a list of questions with you when you consult with the doctor.
- Search the Internet for information about the procedure you are considering.
- Consult with at least three doctors who have experience doing the procedure you are considering.
- Have a friend or relative with you while you are in the consultation meetings with the doctor.
- Consider having a tape recorder present at the consultation so that you can listen to the tape later and review what was discussed in the meeting.
- If the surgery is to be performed outside of the hospital setting, make sure the surgery site is acceptable to you. In California, a law was passed in 1994 requiring accreditation for any setting in the state where surgery is performed using sedation or general anesthesia. By calling the state Division of Medical Quality of the Medical Board of California, patients may find out if a surgery setting is accredited, certified, or licensed—or whether these have been revoked.
- Make sure there will be a nurse or surgical assistant present during surgery. No doctor should perform surgery unassisted. Some doctors use assistants who have not had medical training. Get a copy of the nurse's or surgical assistant's resumé to see if they actually have medical training.
- Make sure the doctor you approve for the surgery is the doctor whose name appears on the consent form as being the one who will actually perform the surgery, and not a student or other person. Have the doctor sign the consent form agreeing to this stipulation. Keep a copy of this consent form for your own records.
- If anesthesia is to be used: Make sure the doctor has an anesthesiologist (a second doctor whose sole focus is to administer the anesthesia and monitor your vital signs) present at the time of your surgery—one who remains present during the entire surgery, and until you have been transferred to the recovery room.
- The doctor's office may have a copy of the anesthesiologist's resumé that you may take. It is normal for the anesthesiologist to call you and introduce himself one or two days before the surgery. At this time you may ask the anesthesiologist any questions about the sedation which concern you.
- View photographs of what the surgical wound will look like during the recovery stage. Seeing the type of bruising and swelling you may be experiencing may help you prepare for the recovery period.
- Remember that everyone recovers from wounds at different speeds. Prepare your home for a recovery time of two to five days longer than what the doctor says it will take for you to recover.
- Make arrangements with a friend or relative to stay with you for the first 24 to 48 hours after the surgery.
- Know that nutrition can greatly assist in the healing process. If you undergo surgery, make sure you do your part to assist your body in the healing process by drinking plenty of water and eating fresh, nutritious foods.