

Cutting back on cutting deep

by Sarah Teleaven

For some, hunkering down for economic uncertainty involves cancelling that Mediterranean cruise and stocking up on discount socks. For other, it means looking for more cost-effective cosmetic surgery options.

According to recent surveys by the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery (ASDS) and the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS), more patients are opting for non-surgical procedures instead of expensive surgery due to costs and risks of taking time off work or away from a job hunt to recover.

There has been steady growth in the use of less expensive options, such as fillers and injectable treatments like Botox and Juvederm. Of the doctors surveyed by the ASDS, 73% reported increased or stable demand for procedures like Botox, chemical peels and hyaluronic fillers. Fifty-nine per cent of patients surveyed reported that concerns about the economy have forced them to rethink plans for cosmetic surgery, with 27% looking into less expensive, non-surgical options.

If not exactly booming, many cosmetic practitioners are finding their services resilient to downward consumer trends. "I'm surprised I am doing as well as I am," says Dr. William Middleton, a Toronto-based cosmetic surgeon and expert on the *W Network's Style by Jury*. "A lot of people would rather spend money on making themselves look better than on vacations, clothing and meals, because it's longer lasting. Once you get your eyes done, they're good for 10 years."

Dr. Arthur Swift, a cosmetic surgeon in Montreal, says that economic chaos has not resulted in a decline, but rather a shift in client demands. Looking for less expensive ways to tighten their faces in a snug economy, cost-savvy professionals are asking about injectable treatments and their comparative longevity. "People are asking how they can do more for less," he says.

The price difference between surgical and non-surgical options can be considerable. Prices vary depending on who you see and which city you're in, but ballpark figures for a facelift and eye adjustment are \$12,000 to \$18,000 with two to three weeks of downtime when patients generally prefer not to leave the house, even with makeup on. Injectables like Botox and Juvederm, on the other hand, generally cost between \$500 and \$3,000, and can be done over a lunch break."

Of those surveyed by the ASPS, 73% believe, particularly in these challenging economic times, appearance and youthful looks play a part in getting hired, being promoted or winning new clients. Some patients are making direct connections between cosmetic procedures and professional success and, though the bulk of their clientele continues to be female, some doctors also report to seeing more professional male patients in the last several months. Dr. Swift's male clientele now accounts for 12% of his business, up from 8% before the downturn. "They want to look youthful in the boardroom," he says. "They realize that it's a very competitive market and that if you look tired it appears that you're offering tired opinions or tired ideas."

Some link recent market jitters to a decline in older patients who tend to have the more expensive procedures. "Older patients are naturally more cautious," says Dr. Frank Lista of the Plastic Surgery Clinic in Mississauga, who has witnessed a decline in requests for facelifts, but already interest in both Botox and breast enhancements. "They're closer to retirement and they see their RSPs significantly affected, so they're more careful. Younger patients have jobs and money."

"Injectables appear to have become a more affordable luxury for those who can't afford to let the fatigue and uncertainty of the last few months show. "Botox is to today's recession what lipstick was to the depression," says Dr. Swift.