



modern medical

# THE ART OF THE CONSULTATION

by Jennifer Fleming, family nurse practitioner

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**T**he medical aesthetic consultation is arguably one of the most important aspects of medical aesthetics. This is a time where the provider not only develops a trusting relationship with the client, but it is also a time to explore their previous aesthetics journey, their concerns, and their goals. Additionally, it is a time to educate, assess, and develop a clearly defined treatment plan that will not leave clients second guessing the strategy.

While consultation styles may vary amongst providers, one thing that should never vary is the time spent with clients during the consultative process. This unique field of medicine and its treatments are more often based on desires and not needs. Clients can clearly see their crow's feet or loss of cheek volume, but they do not always understand why it is occurring. Clients come to their provider seeking guidance, recommendations, and clinical expertise to help them achieve a desired goal. Aesthetics providers must not forget that many cli-

ents are seeking care without truly understanding what the treatment entails or the risks associated with it.

Furthermore, when clients agree to proceed with a treatment, they are purchasing something without knowing what the outcome is going to be. Results can never be 100% guaranteed; therefore, medical aesthetics providers must practice with clear moral intent to do right by clients, even if that means refusing to perform a treatment or referring a client when appropriate.

## TIPS FOR CONSULTATION SUCCESS

### Photos First

In order to elevate the consultation process, the first step should be taking client photos. Photos should be taken in a space where lighting is consistent and facial positions are optimal. When clients have the ability to view photos of their face from different angles, it eliminates the subjective data (where clients focus on the symptoms of aging) and focuses more on objective data (the anatomical changes that are attributing to the visible symptoms). This, in turn, leads to a deeper under-

standing of the anatomical changes and helps clients understand why their provider is recommending certain treatments or procedures.

### Genuine Connection

Just like no two providers are alike, no two clients are alike, so it is imperative to develop skills to adapt to different personalities in order to connect. It is just as important to recognize when the client-provider relationship is not an appropriate fit. This is often determined

when more time is spent listening than speaking as providers are better able to capture key cues that may help guide treatment. For instance, if a client's goals or desires do not align with what the provider believes to be the best course of action, then the client-provider relationship should not proceed. The one caveat to this is to be transparent, and if there is a chance to educate a client, especially as it pertains to safety and risks, this should be discussed.

### The Onion

Delivering information in a way that a client can interpret and understand is one of the best qualities that any provider can possess. While medical aesthetics is not quite the intensive care unit, the way of breaking down complex information with clarity, compassion, and decisiveness are foundational components that cannot be overlooked.

Most clients see the symptom of facial maturity, but the provider's job is to make them see the core issue. No matter the client's initial concerns, the provider should break down the anatomical changes of the face. Explaining this is best in layers, like the act of peeling an onion. These layers consist of skin, superficial fat, retaining ligaments, muscle, deep fat, periosteum, and bone. Utilizing this systemic framework helps clients understand the importance of pan-facial correction rather than symptom-based treatment and educates clients on the different treatment options available.

Start at the skin layer and review changes the client may be seeing, such as hyper- or hypopigmentation, textural concerns, increased pore size, scarring, and overall quality of skin due to decreased collagen and elastin production. Discuss how superficial fat pads start to descend whereas deeper fat pads shrink over time. Discuss the anatomical changes of the bone from mandible bone recession to orbital and nasal widening. Anatomical changes can be further understood as they pertain to a top-down approach – related to gravi-



tational changes, skin laxity, decreased muscle tone, and increasing strength of the platysma bands – as well as changes that occur from a posterior to anterior approach – often as a result of bone regression, fat pad loss, and skin laxity.

## ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Given the complexity of facial aging, it makes sense that clients often require a multi-modality approach to treatment, and therefore, careful consideration must be employed when developing a client's treatment plan. While this may seem elementary to some, it is a skill that sets aesthetics providers apart. They must put all the pieces together – connect with clients, review objective and subjective data, actively listen to client concerns, educate clients on the complexities of facial aging, and ultimately develop a plan that addresses the client's clinical concerns, respects their budget, and clearly defines the process and sequence of how their aesthetic goals will be achieved.

When treatments are performed in a sequential manner by, for instance, completing radio-frequency microneedling treatments prior to a thread lift, a foundational framework is created for clients that will lead to the most optimal outcomes and will provide them with cost benefits.

While no two consultations are alike, there is something to be said for creating mental algorithms that encompass the key elements to a thorough pan-facial consultation. This process should not overwhelm clients, but rather provide them with the tools they need to make informed decisions and to prepare them for their journey.



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*shire. She is also a founder and vice president of Aesthetic Medical Providers of New Hampshire, the first nonprofit in the country that has united in a way that represents all medical aesthetics providers, including physicians, naturopathic doctors, nurse practitioners, physician associates, and nurses. Fleming is leading the field of medical aesthetics through her state advocacy, her holistic approach to augmentation, and her mission to ensure that medicine remains the forefront of this unique and specialized field.*