



## In good nick, without the knife

Jan 8, 2011 10:47 PM | By Margaret Harris

Maureen Allem is a medical doctor and the founder of Skin & Body Renewal, a non-surgical aesthetic clinic. She speaks to Margaret Harris about her work.

### **In terms of permanency, how do non-surgical anti-ageing treatments compare with surgical options?**

There is a misconception that aesthetic treatments are temporary, but it is a different type of permanency. If we look at Botox, which is effective for about five months, it still has long-term benefits. When we are younger, the brow and jaw line have natural elevators. As we age, the dynamics change and the depressors take over. When combined with gravity, a gradual sagging of our brow and jaw line takes place. If we can keep the dynamics between elevators and depressors balanced, with strategically placed Botox injections, then the sagging of the brow and jaw line will be reduced.

### **What are the benefits of non-surgical treatments over surgical ones?**

Both have their reasons for being, but there are many reasons to consider the non-surgical route; here are a few of them.

- There is minimal or no downtime with non-surgical procedures, so

you don't have to take time off work:

- A liquid face-lift is just as immediate as a surgical one, but without the downtime.
- Confidentiality is a major concern for people who want to keep their age-reversing efforts a secret. The bandages, swelling and bruising that go with surgical procedures make this very difficult. Non-surgical aesthetics is a more gradual and subtle process, and therefore is far less noticeable.
- Surgery will tighten loose facial skin, but it will not address volume loss, which is why we get loose facial skin in the first place. If we restore the volume loss with tissue fillers and tighten the skin with a laser technique there may be no need for surgery:
- As with all surgery, there can be medical complications.
- The level of ageing is also a factor. Someone in their late 50s or 60s, with pronounced folds in their cheeks and prominent sagging of the jaw line, would probably need to decide to go the surgical route. They could then maintain their new appearance with aesthetic procedures such as tissue fillers to replace the volume

loss and lasers to improve their skin's texture.

### **Who is your typical client? Do mainly women want these treatments or are men also becoming more interested?**

Most of our patients are white women between 30 and 55. However, this demographic is changing rapidly. We are seeing an increase in the number of men and black people.

### **What advice can you give people looking for non-surgical, anti-ageing treatments?**

Choose an appropriate setting. Aesthetic procedures should be performed in a setting with trained medical personnel who can observe the patients' safety and deal with potential complications. Check the aesthetic clinic's/doctor's credentials - the final outcome of an aesthetic procedure depends on the experience of the professional administering it. Get a complete evaluation by an experienced doctor. Also be informed; speak to others about the procedure. Ask

friends, family and work associates what their experience has been like.

**Apart from the treatments you provide, is there anything people can do to reduce the effects of ageing?**

Yes, the biggest factors are sun, stress, cigarettes and an unhealthy lifestyle, so stay out of the sun as much as possible, wear sun screen on exposed areas every day, stop smoking, balance your emotions to reduce stress, exercise and maintain a healthy diet.

**You are a medical doctor, how and when did you qualify and did you practise as a doctor before beginning your clinics?**

I obtained my medical BSc degree in 1980 and then left university to have a family. With two small children, I re-enrolled at Wits Medical School aged 26, and qualified in 1987. I spent 10 years in conventional medicine, running a ward in a provincial hospital. I then moved into the executive health field, doing annual medicals

and life-style assessments while running a part-time aesthetic practice at home. I could not have completed my medical studies without domestic helpers and nursery schools during the day and family members, when I was on "intake", at night. My family still joke about how I used to study on my bed surrounded by my children and often while breast-feeding my eight-month-old daughter.

**Why did you choose anti-ageing therapy as a career?**

After 10 years in a conventional medical practice, I felt I needed a change, but wasn't sure which direction to follow. A "date" with Botox in early 2001 decided my destiny. After seeing the dramatic physical and psychological results of Botox, I realised the potential of the non-surgical aesthetic industry.

**What do you most enjoy about your job?**

Every day I get to meet amazing, interesting people and I get the

opportunity to make small changes to their lives. Our appearance plays such an important role in the way we feel about ourselves and how others perceive us. My work increases confidence, boosts self-esteem and restores vitality in people. How could I not love this job?

**What do you find most challenging about your job?**

A challenge for all medical doctors who are trained aestheticians, is the increasing need to regulate the profession in South Africa. "Medi spas" have mushroomed, offering practitioners who do not have a medical background, the skills or the expertise that's required to deliver safe treatments with optimal results. Another challenge is the ethical dilemmas of patients with body dysmorphic disorder who continually seek treatments, or someone with an eating disorder who wants to join our weight-loss programme. Managing patients' expectations is also quite challenging