

A La Mode

Doctor's Orders

Courtesy Allure Image Enhancement Center



With lucrative medical practices positioned on one side of the valley and day spas on the other, there's a rich meadow of opportunity blossoming between the two. Medi-spas are now occupying most of this middle ground, offering clients/patients the tempting opportunity to have a cool laser facial, spider-vein removal or even a teeth-whitening procedure while receiving a pampering pedicure.

Courtesy Jova MediSpa



By J. Elaine Spear

Courtesy Maritza's La Look MediSpa



It's true! Teeth-whitening procedures are the newest addition to some medi-spa menus, thanks largely to a

Bring in a Doctor

Until a year ago, Martha's La Look Medi-Spa, a 5,000-square-foot, fully

"The device had to be operated by a registered nurse or physician."



Courtesy Allure Image Enhancement Center

Laser treatments are a major source of business for medi-spas like Allure Image Enhancement Center.

new medical product called Zoom! that can whiten teeth in just 90 minutes without the aid of special lights.

"We recently added dental whitening to our growing list of medi-spa services by working with an area dentist," says Martha Vucsko, lead esthetician, educator and owner of Martha's La

Look Medi-Spa in Chagrin Falls, Ohio.

"Instead of sitting in a dental chair with drills whirring in the background, our clients are invited to have their teeth whitened while relaxing on a cushioned massage table and having their feet and hands pampered with a moisturizing paraffin dip!"

Over the past five years, the spa network has been rife with rumors perpetuated by spa professionals fearful that medical interlopers were intent on taking over the day spa phenomenon. While this is sometimes the case, the vast majority of medi-spas are now being operated by day spa owners wanting to offer prescriptive services; physicians who understand the advantage of medical-grade esthetic treatments; and nurse practitioners who love taking a more holistic approach to patient care.

equipped spa, was extremely focused on providing quality skin care. This dramatically changed after Vucsko naively purchased a medical-grade ND:YAG laser with the intention of offering state-of-the-art spider vein treatments and hair removal.

"The company that sold me the device didn't tell me it had to be operated by either a registered nurse or a physician," she explains. "When the Ohio State Board of Cosmetology was informed we were doing laser treatments, I was told to stop immediately and was left with three choices:

- Try to return the laser for a refund.
- Sue the company that sold me the laser.
- Become affiliated with a physician.



Courtesy Martha's La Look Medi-Spa

Attractive, soothing design details help avoid an overly clinical atmosphere at Martha's La Look Medi-Spa.



Courtesy Juva MediSpa

Medi-spa practitioners at Juva MediSpa strive to keep all services unrushed and personal.

“I had way too much money and effort invested in this laser to even think about abandoning these services, so I sought a relationship within the medical community,” Vucsko relates.

Like most day spa owners, Vucsko has many clients who are directly, or indirectly, associated with the medical field. Soon after her laser debacle, one of her clients told her, “I have a brother-in-law who’s a physician, and he has been thinking about opening a medi-spa. I think the two of you should get together.” They did, and after discovering they shared similar philosophies about skin and body care, Dr. Gregory Classen, D.O., board-certified in plastic surgery and chief of plastic surgery at South Point Hospital in Sagamore Hills, Ohio, became affiliated with the new Martha’s La Look Medi-Spa.

Vucsko’s clients now choose from a plethora of spa and medical services: from cellulite treatments and facials to Botox injections and prescriptive teeth-whitening procedures and from body scrubs and microdermabrasion to

laser spider vein removal and medical peels. Clients can now purchase skin-care lines specifically marketed through physicians like the line by Obagi or get a prescription for Retin-A or Acutane. Says Vucsko, “Under the guidance of our physician, we’re able to incorporate prescriptive skincare treatments into our mix of services.”

Add a Spa

While Martha’s La Look Medi-Spa was created by an ambitious esthetician and day spa owner, the highly publicized Juva Skin & Laser Center MediSpa in New York City is the brainchild of Dr.

“We incorporate prescriptive skincare into our mix of services.”

Bruce Katz, a leading dermatologist who’s focused on providing more comprehensive services for his patients. Four years ago, Dr. Katz enlisted the aid of Angela Caponi, director of operations, to open the Juva MediSpa, in a polished 1,500-square-foot space within his 5,000-square-foot medical facility. Juva’s unique niche in the spa market is based on giving a medical bent to every spa service, whether it’s a state-of-the-art anti-aging facial or a simple body polish.

In addition to offering services similar to those offered at Martha’s La Look Medi-Spa, Juva MediSpa offers the Pulse-Peel, a medical resurfacing treatment containing 5-FU, a substance that has been clinically proven to destroy precancerous cells. Caponi says this medical-grade ingredient, along with naturally derived antioxidants like vitamin C and green tea extracts, produces power-

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ful anti-aging facials and even body polish treatments that help eliminate sun-damaged cells! Juva MediSpa also offers medical-grade acne facials.

While Juva is still focused on offering a total spa experience—its aromatherapy massage and paraffin treatments are divine—the Allure Image Enhancement Center, a medi-spa in Upland, California, is strictly on a medical mission. Mina Grasso, a registered nurse with a M.S. degree in nursing, and her husband, John Grasso, M.D., an anesthesiologist, opened their medi-spa in 1999 after realizing the opportunities this kind of business holds for providing superior patient care. These two forward-thinking medical practi-



Courtesy Maritza's La Look Medi-Spa

Clients feel secure with the medical professionalism that medi-spas can provide.

Blues. The antithesis of most medical practitioners, Mina Grasso has a penchant for tight miniskirts and high heels

The air is usually scented with lavender and lemongrass oils.



Courtesy Allure Image Enhancement Center

The comfort of a spa-like treatment room softens the experience of receiving medically based treatments.

tioners have positioned their medi-spa as an alternative to the high-volume, low-touch environment of many medical facilities.

The Allure Image Enhancement Center has purple and black couches, a large chair shaped like a high heel and artwork reminiscent of the House of

that she tempers with a traditional white physician's coat. Spa music creates a soothing atmosphere in this medical facility, and the air is usually scented with lavender and lemongrass essential oils. Whenever practical, the treatment rooms feature flickering candlelight!

Even so, don't let this warm, fuzzy environment fool you. While basic massage and facial services are available at the Allure Image Enhancement Center, the Grassos are strongly focused on providing Botox and collagen injections; laser hair removal; spider vein removal; medical-grade intense pulsed light photo rejuvenation; diet and nutritional counseling for diabetics; and a strong anti-aging program. In addition to Dr. Grasso's services, Allure has two independent physicians who are available for consultations with their patients.

"I have a low threshold for pain, so I'm very empathetic when treating our



Courtesy Allure Image Enhancement Center

At Allure Image Enhancement, dry heat sauna and hot steam capsules prepare clients for body wraps and make the perfect treatment tables for facials.

patients,” says Grasso. “Instead of being hurried through Botox injections, for instance, our patients relax on a massage table while we completely numb the facial area before injecting the Botox solution. I also ice their faces afterwards to ensure there’s no bruising.” Grasso’s approach to laser spider-vein treatments is also said to be nearly painless.

The Allure Center is on a mission: to give babyboomers and senior citizens the opportunity to be treated with state-of-the-art level anti-aging medicine. “There’s an opinion now being voiced by certain practitioners within the medical community that diminishing hormone production produces aging, and not the other way around,” explains Dr. Grasso. “This means that aging is quite possibly a treatable condition.”

The Grassos offer a holistic anti-aging treatment program that includes natural hormone replacement therapy, supplements, diet and exercise. “We’re about as far away as you can get from Beverly Hills in terms of demographics, and yet we still have a waiting list for our anti-aging services,” says Dr. Grasso. “This should serve as a wake-up call about how important anti-aging services are to a significant

number of people who want to both look and feel better for as long as they can.”

Natural Fit

Many medi-spas—whether they’re owned by spa professionals or medical practitioners—are swiftly building their businesses based on the natural synergy between the esthetic and medical fields. Vucsko, for instance, allows physicians and dentists to perform certain medical procedures at her Martha’s La

Look Medi-Spa and keep 100% of their fees. “We have to do this because it’s illegal for physicians to split fees,” she explains. “In return, we receive an endless stream of referrals from Dr. Classen for high-ticket services such as medical-grade facials and mechanical massage treatments before and after liposuction procedures. The same holds true for medical-grade microdermabrasion treatments to support his facial procedures, as well as for those who aren’t quite ready for surgical rejuvenation.”

If you’re considering converting your business to a medi-spa, Grasso advises that you first evaluate your ability to attract medical personnel to your business. “Despite our sterling reputation, we’re currently having difficulties staffing registered nurses,” says Grasso. “This is because the hospitals in our area are understaffed, forcing them to offer top pay as well as hiring bonuses. It’s hard for us to compete with this level of compensation.” Spa technicians, on the other hand, are reportedly flocking to both Grasso’s and Vucsko’s medi-spa operations for employment opportunities.

The advertising costs can also be extraordinarily high when you offer

such a diverse menu; a facility like Grasso's medi-spa necessitates buying several Yellow Pages ads. "We do permanent makeup, microdermabrasion, Botox injections, anti-aging treat-

medi-spa owner, Vucsko believes the saving grace of any medi-spa operation is the relationship that it cultivates with physicians. "You really need a steady stream of medical refer-

"This should serve as a wake-up call about how important anti-aging services are."

ments, cellulite treatments, and offer clinical advice on diet, exercise and lifestyle issues," says Grasso. "All of these things have special places in the phone book, forcing us to purchase thousands of dollars worth of advertising each month."

Insurance is another major cost. Just because one medi-spa service is covered under your current policy, doesn't mean others will be. "Because of our medical focus, we would love to offer women's health services such as pap smears," says Grasso. "The problem is this requires a different, and very expensive, malpractice insurance policy. To circumvent this problem, we're currently looking for a practitioner who carries his or her own insurance."

With a year under her belt as a

rals to make this whole thing worth your while," she says. "For this to happen, you have to work with physicians who believe in the value of your services and are willing to integrate what you have to offer into their medical programs. We're fortunate to be working with a physician who's eager to do this. As a result, we're able to improve the quality of care we provide our patients and clients, while making our own business more profitable." ♦

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