

Reclaiming Skincare in Dermatology

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Many practices struggle with ways to introduce and integrate skincare products into their patient's treatment plans as well as infuse staff with excitement about practice product options. Most patients want effective skincare products, and almost every cosmetic practice sells an excellent line of products. So why is integration still so difficult for some? The answer is often three-fold;

1. Practices worry that some patients may feel they are getting a "hard sell" if product discussions are introduced during their visits;
2. In very busy practices there is concern that the physician will get "sidetracked" with a product discussion in the exam room and consequently run behind for all subsequent patient appointments.
3. Staff is not fully "on board" in terms of personal usage, excitement and willingness to integrate a skincare discussion into an already tight schedule.

How can these legitimate concerns be reconciled with the desire to assimilate skincare products more fully into the practice?

Reclaiming Sacred Ground without Disrupting Flow

Dermatologists undisputedly have the best understanding of the numerous products and compounds used topically in medicine. This depth and breadth of knowledge would seemingly translate into the highest sales of skincare products in the practice setting, but for the vast majority of practices this is not the case. What is the disconnect?

Historically, medical dermatology encounters are geared to provide clinically excellent care in a timely fashion. The concept of incorporating non-essential, some would say clinically irrelevant, discussion pertaining to product choices is difficult for many clinicians to embrace. However, many in this group would also like to see sales of skincare products increase. There is significant evidence indicating the value of clinician initiated conversation in order for staff to be successful in transitioning a patient's subsequent skincare discussion into a sale and compliant usage. Discipline and a well thought out plan for transition is the foundation for this natural transition from clinical encounter with a physician or physician extender, to a skincare discussion with an aesthetician or skincare counselor.

Details. Details. Details.

Practices can promote the availability of an aesthetician or a skincare counselor in office collateral materials, messages-on-hold, and on websites, Facebook, and Twitter. Other opportunities to promote staff-extenders exist when patients book appointments and when staff members confirm appointments. The frequency and excitement level in communicating what is new in the office with

regard to skincare products will have a direct correlation to the sales of skincare products during a given patient visit.

Interestingly, there is evidence that the addition of a skincare product sale also increases the retention rate of each patient-critical in today's competitive cosmetic medical world.

Is Marketing Products Pushy?

If a patient has a skincare need and it is not addressed during a visit, don't we risk the potential perception that we are not invested in all aspects of our patients skin health? Patients will only be excited if everyone in the office is excited. Photos and patient testimonials will be important tools for spreading the news, and social media and practice websites offer ideal platforms from which to present it. Highlighting individual products based on seasonal relevance or new formulations is also important.

One "Ah Ha" opportunity that is often overlooked in skincare product displays are "shelf talkers." A small "shelf talker" card that explains a few basic things about each product is a terrific communication tool that should be employed in every office. Information included on "shelf talker" cards should address the following;

- Who is a candidate for this product? (Hint: Aging Skin)
- How is it used? (Be creative! A "pea size" amount can be photographed!)
- How much is it, and how long does it last? (Be real. Don't we all want to know this?)

Training / Staffing

Employees must be ready, willing, and able to support a newly re-tooled plan to be a part of patient's skincare lives. That said, developing a robust skincare business requires a unique type of professional training and focus. Staff development should occur in an ongoing way with an end goal that ensures that the team is skilled in the identification of skin types, has knowledge of skin physiology, and is versed in the history of skincare and the health benefits associated with good skincare. Most importantly, they must know how to effectively interact with the diverse clientele of a busy and successful aesthetics practice. Additional training needs for staff members will differ depending on their respective positions within the practice. Examples include: A telephone operator will need training on integrating information about the new skincare consultant into the practice's daily appointment reminder calls, and the clinician and/or medical assistant will benefit from training on how best to transition patients from the exam room to an aesthetician or skincare counselor.

Meeting the Buyer's Needs

Once the skincare team is trained and the flow for incorporating a skincare discussion has been worked out, then what? Consumers become highly motivated and sales tend to increase when three buyer needs are met: When something *unexpected* is offered, when something is offered at a *timely moment*,

and when something is *meaningful* to them. It's not difficult to meet all of these needs in the dermatology practice environment.

Unexpected

How many cosmetic medical practices provide a skincare counselor, ready to zero in on their specific needs during a dermatology appointment? Not many. Does this mean it's not a good idea? Absolutely not! It is an innovative concept based on the changing needs of clients, and patients love it. Today's customer is very involved and values choice above all else. Customers choose and customize everything from how they receive daily news to how they take their coffee. Select retailers recognize this desire and are tailoring their environments to meet this emerging customer need. Medical practices can also tailor what, when, and how they offer skincare products to patients. The attention paid to patients' unique skincare needs will eventually become a compelling factor in their loyalty to the practice.

Timely

There is an understood link between good skincare and physical health. One of the key indicators of ill-health today is poor skin color, tone, and/or texture. An offer to provide further information and guidance regarding proper skincare should be made to all dermatology and plastic surgery patients. It's a fact that today's patient is willing to invest time, energy, and resources when provided with skincare solutions tailored to meet their specific needs.

Meaningful

The ongoing use of products and the expansion in use to other products is rooted in face-to-face, meaningful education with experts inside the practice. Rather than having a "point of sale" mentality regarding skincare product sales, practices must adapt staff to new roles as educators and coaches. If a patient buys a bottle of sunscreen and is then educated in a meaningful way regarding appropriate use, that patient will likely begin applying almost a 1/4 cup of sunscreen to their arms, legs, chest, neck, and face after showering each day. When one considers that sort of usage, it does not take long to realize that patient education and demonstration is critical for the long-term growth and health of the practice's skincare business.

Conclusion

When it comes to skincare products, today's aesthetic clients are not looking for the "hard sell" but rather an opportunity to choose and customize. Creating an opportunity for patients to address all of their skincare needs during a patient visit and reinventing salespeople as educators addresses this issue and has proved to be a successful pathway toward fully integrating skincare products into treatment plans for numerous practices.

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