

THE MANY FACES OF COSMETIC SURGERY

BY; William E. Silver MD FACS

The art of Plastic Surgery is divided into two main categories: Cosmetic and Reconstructive. Each area is of specific interest to the modern surgeon who chooses to participate in the practice of Plastic Surgery.

Today there are many physicians, from a variety of backgrounds, who play a role in delivering the service of plastic surgery to the public. Many physicians who are specialty trained and boarded will get additional training to develop the skills necessary to practice in the field of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery. Most will tend to specialize in areas they are most interested in. An Otolaryngologist may specialize in strictly Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery while an Ophthalmologist may go into the practice of plastic surgery on structures around the eye, Oculoplastic Surgery. Even general Plastic Surgeons may specialize in specific areas depending on their individual desires, education and experience. The specialty of Dermatology has also developed a sub-board certification in Dermatologic Surgery.

The key to success of all the specialties that deal with plastic surgery is that the individual physician must have the formal training in the specific area that he or she performs on their respective patients. It is the obligation of all the specialties and the medical community to make sure this is the case. Usually this is accomplished by hospital credentialing committees or similar authorized groups or societies. As an example the American Board of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive is an ABMS equivalent board and thus establishes the certification of its candidates by formal examination before they can be certified. The sub board of Dermatologic Surgery has a similar exam structure. Plastic Surgery also has its own certifying board—The American Board Of Plastic Surgery. Our community is quite fortunate to have a large number of certified surgeons who perform cosmetic surgery in these different specialties.

The reconstructive aspect of plastic surgery is often overshadowed by the massive attention that the media gives to the cosmetic side of this specialty. It is no wonder that there are so many doctors wanting to get into the field of caring for the cosmetic patient. It is therefore even more important today that the medical field scrutinize its own to make sure the public is being appropriately treated by whatever type of physician decides to get involved with cosmetic patient care.

Having made that statement, however, one must realize that the benefits of cosmetic surgery are many and very far reaching. They can impact and change patient's lives. The new confidence a child experiences when otoplasty is performed and other children no longer laugh or make fun of him/her. They become more social and learn positive interaction with other children to develop the social skills that will serve them later in life. The teenager or adult who has his/her nose reshaped and now believes themselves attractive, now has the confidence to initiate and participate in social and professional activities. They believe themselves capable of achieving so much more and are willing to take the chance to do so, where they may have hesitated in the past. The man in his forties/fifties who is in the public eye because of his profession and wants a younger fresher look to give him the edge he feels he needs to compete or be accepted by his younger peers, so he has a blepharoplasty done. A middle age woman who is now divorced and feeling unattractive and looking for something to change her life has a facelift or liposuction and now finds herself being noticed and "hit on" by men she may meet in the course of her every day life. Body image can truly give an individual self confidence or can make them feel inferior and withdrawn. Breast implants, tummy tucks, body liposuction, blepharoplasty, hair replacement facelifts, and rhinoplasty are just a few of the many cosmetic procedures that can give patients the feeling of self esteem that may allow them to improve other areas of their lives.

There are two aspects of Plastic Surgery, the pure cosmetic side and the reconstructive, functional side. Most of the surgeons who perform cosmetic surgery do reconstructive surgery as well. The deviated septum or collapsed nasal valve that hampers breathing

can be corrected by rhinoplasty improving both function and appearance. Many people have very heavy upper eyelids that can impair their peripheral vision. This can be corrected by blepharoplastic surgery to restore normal peripheral vision and give them a more refreshed look. The child born with a cleft lip/nasal deformity can have that repaired by a facial plastic surgeon and not experience any of the cruelties children so innocently inflict on others. Often patients with head and neck cancers or skin cancers of the facial structures will need reconstructive plastic surgery to not only look better but to function more normally. Many accident victims choose cosmetic surgery to repair the injuries they have suffered to restore the affected area to a normal appearance thus making them feel better about themselves and restore normal function to the affected area.

There are many projects that plastic and regional plastic surgeons do that are strictly “pro bono” One such project is the Face to Face program of the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery that treats women who have suffered injuries from domestic violence. They also sponsor sending surgeons to foreign countries to treat under privileged patients with congenital abnormalities and accident victims. The visiting surgeons also teach the local physicians the techniques that are used in the United States. There are many other programs similar to this including Operation Smile and Thousand Smiles. These programs are examples of how the plastic surgeons give back to the communities in which they practice.

The face of medicine will change drastically over the next 25 years as the computer age encroaches further on the practice of medicine, in some cases reducing the individual physician’s input to looking at numbers and reports after a patient is “plugged” in to the system. All medicine and surgery will change, however, the skills and art of cosmetic surgery will probably be one of the last areas to change. With the advent of computer imaging, communication between the patient and the surgeon is imperative and a necessary tool to achieving the results desired by both the patient and the physician. The real challenge of the Cosmetic Plastic Surgeon today is to make sure that our procedures are not industry driven. We as practicing physicians and surgeons need to make sure that

what we recommend to our patients are true and tried procedures and that we do not fall into the trap of performing procedures or recommending treatments that are espoused by industries interested in selling products or equipment.

We must maintain a higher degree of self awareness because most cosmetic surgery that we perform on our patients are strictly elective, making our job highly scrutinized if even the smallest complication should occur. A complication in the field of cosmetic surgery can be more devastating than if it had occurred in a patient that had little or no choice in having the procedure. This subjective scrutiny makes the field of cosmetic surgery so grueling because as in all of medicine, complications do occur. It is just harder to justify a complication when the procedure is strictly elective. Those surgeons who perform cosmetic surgery know this well and it is important to carefully explain this matter to our patients. The old adage of not guaranteeing results in medicine has never been truer than in the field of cosmetic surgery. It is extremely important that the physicians choosing to practice in the field of cosmetic surgery be aware of all aspects of the patient's health history and all aspects of cosmetic surgery so that proper referrals can be made when necessary. This gives the patient the best of both worlds and a security and confidence in his/her physician.

The results of cosmetic surgery may appear to be superficial and a choice made by vanity but our society places a great emphasis on appearance and changing one's appearance can alter a life course. It is hard to put into words the effects the surgery we do has on our patients but it is a palpable, measurable, a significant entity and that entity is what makes what we do worthwhile and so rewarding.

About the author:

William E. Silver, M.D., F.A.C.S. founded Premier Image Cosmetic & Laser Surgery 1970, Georgia's first multi-specialty cosmetic surgery practice. Dr. Silver has specialty training and experience in Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery. His primary residency was in Otolaryngology and with additional training and studies, he received his second board certification by the American Board of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive

Surgery. He has received numerous academic awards and achievements, including the recent Lester Brown Lifetime Achievement Award from the Georgia Society of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery for his contributions to both the medical and civic communities. He has been in private practice in Atlanta for 36 years. He is currently a Fellowship director with the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery where he is involved with training young surgeons in the specialty of Facial Plastic Surgery. He is Clinical Assistant Professor in the Department of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery at Emory University.