

Choosing a Clinical Line for Your Practice

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Fifteen years ago, anyone seeking out a physician's expertise to correct a skin condition usually left the office with a prescription in hand. This was the practice of the times. Most doctors would never even have considered dispensing products directly to patients out of their own office. Times have changed. The gap between aesthetics and medicine has narrowed considerably as pioneers in the skin care field began developing non-prescription, science-based, clinically researched, results-oriented professional strength skin care products for in-office dispensing. Today, patients are skipping the drug store and purchasing skin care options directly from their doctor's office. Along with clinical skin care products, the use of chemical peels, botulinum toxin type A injections, microdermabrasion, and dermal fillers have also become popular non-surgical offerings on the menu of services.

WHY IT MAKES SENSE

A number of factors have prompted this paradigm shift in the medical community: an aging population with the desire and the means to look younger longer; managed care and insurance capping doctors' incomes; better data on skin biology and function; the refinement of non-invasive technology; and improved efficacy of ingredients available. This shift has been a lucrative one for the clinical practices which have embraced it. In the case of chemical peels, the second most popular non-surgical cosmetic procedure after Botox® injections, worldwide use of chemical peels generated fees of \$1.1 billion in 2001.

Treatment volume is expected to grow to \$1.7 billion by 2007. The market for cosmeceuticals is even more robust with estimated annual sales at \$12.4 billion and an expected increase to

\$16 billion by the end of this decade. The demand for skin care products makes up more than half of the market, with last year's sales reaching \$6.4 billion.

People are searching for skin care solutions and will pay the price to get results. Your expertise as a skin care professional fosters trust from patients and makes you the logical choice in dispensing advice, services, and products to the public. Add to that the convenience of having the products available to your patient at the time of

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consultation, and you have eliminated the need for your patient to be at the mercy of recommendations from a drug store clerk or cosmetic counter salesperson.

GETTING STARTED

Whether you have an existing practice or are evolving your practice into a medical spa, the criteria for introducing a new product line remains the same. Select a product line which complements your menu of services with pre- and post-treatment options. The right product line will not only enhance in-office treatments, but will also help prolong the results which in turn promotes patient loyalty and potential referrals. Here are some "must haves" to look for when selecting a product line for in-office dispensing.

Safety and Efficacy.

The skin care industry is full of eye-catching package designs and slick advertising campaigns. They are designed to evoke an emotional connection between product and consumer. Don't be seduced by the surface appeal or "buzz" created by marketing claims. Trendy lines with trendy ingredients come and go. Look for companies with a history of delivering visible results with minimal downtime. "First, do no harm," says Dr. Paul Benchwick, Medical Director of PCA Skin Center, Scottsdale. "So

of the past. The "less is more" philosophy is the more popular approach to improving skin conditions. Ingredients with a proven track record of safety and efficacy include alpha and beta hydroxyl acids such as lactic, citric, and salicylic; antioxidant vitamins A, C, and E; and phytoactives derived from pumpkin and aloe. Some of the newer ingredients showing impressive improvement in skin's function and appearance include peptides and epidermal growth factors. Pick a line which does its homework on the formulation process. Those companies which offer products backed by legitimate science will be happy to provide that information, along with the opportunity to try their products. If you or your staff are going to sell a product or treatment to patients, you have to be sold on it first.

Next, take a look at the company's representatives. Their complexions are their calling cards. Ask them what they use on their skin. They have to believe in a product to promote it, and what better way to promote it than to proudly display the results. No matter what our professions, we are consumers first. We use what works, and shelve what doesn't.

Many consumers shop with their "nose," seeking out over-the-counter "feel good, smell good" products

based on an appealing fragrance or color. This is an opportunity for your expertise to intervene and educate. Skin care products, especially those formulated for facial use, may contain ingredients which could provoke sensitive skin or trigger allergic reactions. By choosing a skin care line which does not add any fragrance or artificial dyes to the formula, you greatly diminish the risk of an allergic reaction which could overshadow any other benefits.

Custom Fit Care.

Skin comes in many colors, conditions, and configurations. That is why "one size fits all" does not work in the realm of skin care. While many companies base their fortunes on one or a few "wonder products," a good clinical skin care line should offer a diversity of treatments and products which are intentionally formulated to address skin concerns of patients from any age and race: teens scarred by acne, women of color seeking to even out discoloration, fair skinned women in need of relief from rosacea, or baby boomers trying to repair sun damaged skin. This depth and scope of professional treatments and home care



"The very basis of a good aesthetic practice will be the peels which are performed."

— Rawlins Apilado

many products cause side effects and secondary reactions. My first two questions for a prospective line are 'Does it work?' and 'What are the side effects?'"

Consumers no longer have the time or desire to go into hiding while they heal from aggressive treatments

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products gives you, the professional, flexibility to customize treatments which fit the needs of your patients. That level of personalization ensures better results, elevates your credibility in the eyes of the patient, and further cements the level of trust between patient and practitioner.

The Cost of Quality.

Price point can't be ignored when selecting a skin care line. You want to carry a line which will be competitively priced, yet give your practice enough of a profit margin to make it worth your while. This is where the balance between quality and cost must be weighed. You get what you pay for. Professional brands will yield more visible results than store brands because they utilize newer delivery technology and higher concentrations of top grade ingredients. A top tier skin care line won't compromise quality for cost, and will back it up with proven results. "Patients come to us because they trust us," says Joan Lucas, R.N., B.S.N., and Medical Spa Director for Vito Quatela, M.D., F.A.C.S., a board certified Facial Plastic Surgeon and Medical Director of Q the Medical Spa at Lindsay House in Rochester, New York. "We won't sell what doesn't work. Cost isn't an issue if they get results."

Support After the Sale.

You've settled on a skin care line which fits your needs, the sale has been made, the packages are arriving and you have questions. Who will answer them? A reputable skin care company will have a full-service support system in place to help ensure

your success: marketing, education, and customer service support.

Not every clinical practice can afford the time or cost for an in-house marketing staff. A smart skin care company understands that and will have a comprehensive marketing support program in place to help you promote their products. Ask the company what kind of marketing tools they provide to their customers. They should include in-office support such as product displays, product information brochures, before and after photos, patient education materials, as well as a sustained advertising campaign which promotes the unique features of the product line.

Being well-informed about the product line you have chosen is also critical in effective dispensing. Established skin care companies consider education a top priority for their customers and make it accessible in a number of ways. The company's menu of education options should provide ongoing access to experienced educators who teach courses on skin health and maintenance, in-depth product knowledge, as well as hands-on training in the safe and effective use of the treatments and products. The more progressive skin care companies will also offer the convenience of online learning courses which you can take in the privacy and comfort of your home or office.

A responsive and knowledgeable customer service staff which is ready to answer questions or offer tips on how to improve your outcomes is your best ally in building a successful retailing arm of your practice. Ask the company what kind of training and orientation the customer service

representatives receive for their position. How much training do they receive in product knowledge and protocols? How is their knowledge tested during their training period? Written exams? Oral exams? Practice service calls? Those which stand behind their products know the importance of keeping their customers satisfied and will not scrimp on the time and expense required when it comes to training its representatives to provide you with prompt, courteous, and accurate assistance.

Selecting a clinical skin care line can be daunting because of the growing number of companies in the marketplace, all vying for your attention at medical meetings, industry trade shows, and through ads in trade publications. Selecting the right one for your practice doesn't have to be difficult if you know the right questions to ask. Never settle for unsatisfactory answers, and always remember that in the end, what will benefit your patient most will reward your practice most. **ATI**



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