

# DERMASCOPE

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Continuing Education

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# Increase Reputation and Revenue

by Richard Linder

**S**kin health is a highly competitive industry. Long-term success, however, can come from low-cost investments in yourself that have high impact. Education is something that can never be taken from you and can make you more effective in your career. You can gain knowledge in formal channels offering degrees, certification, or recognition. Acquiring certification in various aspects of the industry will give your practice what it takes to stand out, increase income, and shore up client bases. There are a multitude of opportunities available to the aesthetician. It is important, though, that you find reputable yet economical choices for any means you choose for continuing your education.

On the other hand, many people find the informal educational channels most rewarding. By spending valuable time with mentors, talented colleagues, and a diversity of people willing to share their insights, you can get great personal satisfaction and growth. Whether you prefer informal or formal education channels, regular participation in continuing education activities is an efficient way to build your knowledge, improve your skill set, and more effectively treat your patients. I will share some of my observations and experiences from having the pleasure of working directly with many medical aestheticians and meeting thousands while traveling.

In a previous column, I offered recommendations for various types of continuing education, including skin physiology, disease pathways, specific skin conditions, effective ingredients and ingredient combinations, and advanced treatment options. Additionally, I made a case for learning about nutrition, general business, basic graphic design, ways to improve efficiency in your practice, and developing other talents you may have.

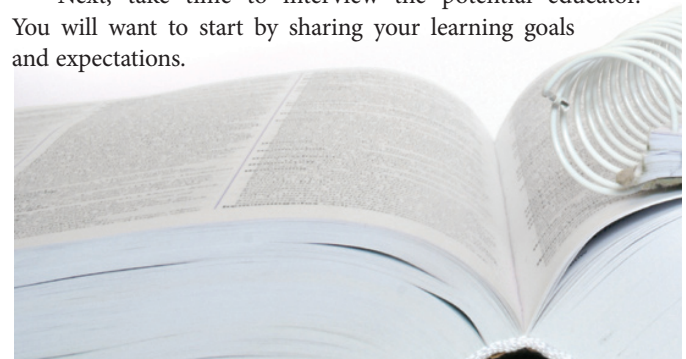
Getting past the first hurdle of what to learn, next you need to determine who you want to deliver the education and how (in person versus online, for example). Then, because it is so important to obtain a quality education from a reputable source, I strongly recommend finding who you want to deliver your education. From there, you can determine the best way to learn from the options available.

It is generally best to start with your personal network, seeking referrals and recommendations from people you trust. Share with your friends, family, co-workers, and other people you respect what you want to learn and ask about their experience and suggestions.

While you are likely to get excellent recommendations from your network, it is vital that you continue with your own investigation. Remember, you are looking for both reputable and economical continuing education choices that will have a high impact on your career. Look within the industry, through other independent educational providers in your area, and local universities and community colleges.

Before simply registering for a class, you must have a high degree of certainty that the class will meet your expectations. There are a few ways you can go about this. First, look to see if the potential provider is conducting a workshop or general session at an industry trade show. This will give you a wonderful (and free!) opportunity to see the quality of education they deliver, the depth of their expertise, and how effective they are at teaching concepts to an audience.

Next, take time to interview the potential educator. You will want to start by sharing your learning goals and expectations.



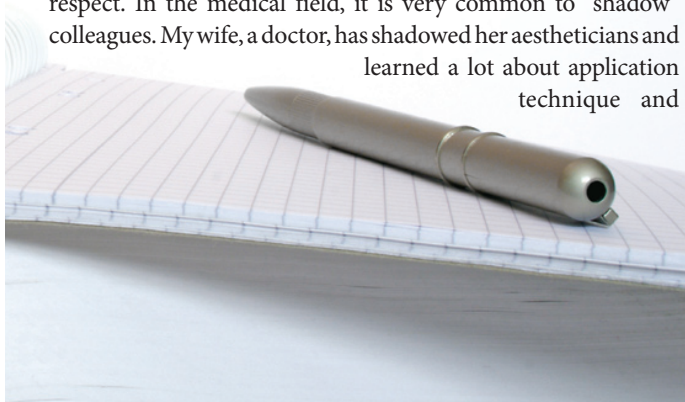
Then, start asking questions that will tell you whether those expectations can and will be met. This dialogue is crucial, because a high quality educator may be able to offer additional insight, other suggestions, or create a customized program tailored to you and your practice's needs.

Finally, once you are comfortable that the course(s) you have selected will meet your continuing education expectations, you need to do a cost-benefit analysis. Here, you are evaluating the actual cost associated with the education compared to the immediate and long-term benefits you will receive. Of course, building your knowledge base and adding to your skill set with the right continuing education will lead to better patient results and make you more marketable as a sole practitioner or part of a larger practice. It keeps you on a career path that will lead to long-term success. Remember, continuing your education is an investment in yourself, your practice, and your future. With minimal exception, there will be a cost involved. Quality education is not free. In addition, you may have to give up time to treat patients in order to attend a seminar, not to mention any other expenses related to traveling to the location.

In some instances, you will have the option of continuing your education through online learning. This can be beneficial in terms of schedule, flexibility, and moving at your own pace. A potential drawback to purely online education is that it may not match well with your learning style. If, like me, you are most successful with hands-on learning or auditory learning (listening or engaging live with others) an online-based class will have its challenges. On the other hand, a well-designed, interactive online course can overcome these limitations. This method of education is quickly changing as bandwidth, on-demand video, and sophisticated software are developed to tailor learning modules to your needs. Over the last 10 years I have, on occasion, taken online coursework from topics as wide ranging as legal issues for small businesses, nutritional supplements, and cooking. My personal experience and enjoyment has been varied.

Informal channels of education are commonly the best sources for the self-directed and auditory hands-on learner. Informal education can be as organized as regular participation with your colleagues at professional associations for aestheticians (in Arizona I have observed very good professional development by the Arizona Aesthetics Association AZAA, and there are many local ones near you) to just spending time with mentors or organizing a small "Journal Club" made up of people you respect. In the medical field, it is very common to "shadow" colleagues. My wife, a doctor, has shadowed her aestheticians and

learned a lot about application  
technique and



patient care. If you see or hear of an aesthetician or doctor that has excellent skills or knowledge, do not be shy about asking to spend time with them. We are all in this life together,



and you will be giving them a great compliment; they will not mind giving you the time.

It is easy to get caught up in the daily grind of work. I encourage you to be mindful of your need for personal growth and investment in yourself. Plan a bit more time to stay at a professional conference (this publication is known for sponsoring excellent trade shows) and ask a colleague to share experiences, plan a coffee “sharing-of-knowledge session” with someone you respect, or host a dinner with a diverse set of colleagues and bring dinner topics like “tips for building good patient relationships” or “what I wish I had known years ago” and have fun. It can be very economical and sometimes more impactful than formal education. Most of our greatest insights come from just living and engaging with others not necessarily from a classroom.

Developing yourself professionally and personally and applying what you learn to your practice increases your credibility, improves patient results, adds to the high level of standards and professionalism in the skin care industry, and builds your bottom line. Your success in continuing your education will rest on your ability to identify reputable education providers and find educational opportunities that meet your goals and expectations while still being affordable and delivering a real benefit to your practice and career. You made the investments necessary to gain licensure as an aesthetician so that you could improve your patients’ lives. Continuing your education allows you to expand your ability to treat them effectively, further improving not only their lives but also those all around you.



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*While there, he was awarded a grant from Harvard University to study the purchasing behaviors and preferences of the aging baby boomers. This study focused specifically on brand recognition of companies that solve health-related issues. Linder also serves on the Board of Directors of the National Holistic Institute.*

