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PLASTIC SURGERY PRACTICE

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Beard Transplants p18

Best of 2012 p35

Santa's Makeover p63

Gucci, Prada, and Ghannel?

Tracy Drumm discusses the appeal and dangers of knock-off plastic surgery products



By Tracy Drumm

Breaking News!" exclaimed the familiar voice of Anderson Cooper. "A woman was injected with a knock-off facial filler reportedly made of 'fix-a-flat' and super glue ..." Astonished by what I was hearing, I listened in shock to the story that had made national news. As the details unfolded, I recalled several other stories of injections gone awry from homemade filler concoctions or poorly administered treatments at "Botox parties" and hair salons.

After hearing this latest incident, I couldn't help but wonder how these patients could have been so blinded by a bargain that they didn't see the red flags. I admittedly critiqued their decisions. Didn't they know better? How could they have received a medical treatment at a friend's home? Didn't the 90% discount cause alarm? I was as equally disappointed with the consumers for their choices as I was the providers for harming these patients and the industry as a whole.

Several days later with this disturbing "fix-a-flat" story fresh in my mind, my thoughts were interrupted by a delivery from UPS. The surprise package contained a gift from my mother. The gift was a Chanel shirt accompanied by a note that

explained how excited my mom was to find this high-end piece for a bargain while traveling abroad. Thrilled to add the beautiful shirt to my wardrobe, I held it up to my shoulders and admired it in the mirror. Spelled out in brilliant and shiny-silver rhinestones, the word Ghannel was prominently displayed across the front. Yes, that's right: Ghannel. The famous CC's of the late, great Coco Chanel were featuring an additional line of gems that delicately transformed the legendary C's into G's.

After suspiciously eying my shirt, I realized that unless you were familiar with the brand, you could easily confuse this knock-off for the real deal. Perhaps it was the glare from the excess rhinestones, but at the moment of seeing my Ghannel shirt reflected back at me a light bulb went off. It became crystal clear that there is a tremendous knowledge gap between industry and consumers.

Simply put, when presented with a seemingly great deal, it can be easy to overlook the facts and forego the research. My mom reminded me of how purchasing decisions are made when brand knowledge is taken out of the equation. If a consumer or patient is not familiar with a product, they will likely resort to the only factor they have experience with: price. Excited by the thought of "Botox on a beer budget," the consumers in these injection horror stories were caught at the crossroads of great deal meets limited awareness.

I realized that instead of faulting anyone, we need to work proactively as a community to continually educate patients on the importance of choosing the right provider for their cosmetic needs. By remembering the three concepts below, your practice can help patients learn to distinguish between trusted trends and tricky knock-offs.

1 Celebrate Groundhog Day Over and Over Again

Running a clinic can often resemble a scene from the movie *Groundhog Day*, where daily tasks are methodically repeated. The key for turning each visit into a learning opportunity is to apply the 400 rule to every appointment. As a provider, it may be the 400th time you have said something, but it is likely the first time the patient is hearing it. Repeat what is routine as if it is the first time you are saying it. Remembering this simple rule is an easy way to turn conversations from robotic to robust and leave a lasting impression.

2 Clear the Clutter

It's time to ditch the dirt ... the celebrity dirt, that is. Throw away gossip magazines, and instead replace them with educational materials. Brochures, photo albums, even white papers will all better serve your patients than catching up on Hollywood scandals and plastic surgery do's and don't's. It's always good to keep an issue of the latest



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Glamour on hand for the loyal patient who visits monthly, but as a general rule keep reception area reading focused on facts rather than fiction from gossip magazines. Remember, patients are paying for not only treatments from your office, but for your opinion and guidance as well.

3 Walk and Talk Credentialing

Imagine that your receptionist has an invisible baton. Her job is to pass it from one staff member to the next with a credentialing statement. Basically, each staff member's goal is to leave the patient with a fact about the next team member they will be seeing. The statements should reinforce the employee's training, expertise, and credentials. "Fun facts" that

build relationships while simultaneously educating are also incredibly effective. If Sarah at your front desk, for example, is taking a patient to a treatment room, she may say, "Mrs Jones, you will be seeing Michelle today, who has performed nearly 2,000 filler injections and is known for her natural results. You are truly in great hands!" Conversely, when Michelle has finished treating the patient and is walking her back to reception, she can say, "Be sure to talk to our esthetician, Lynne, about Latisse®. You won't believe how long her lashes have grown!"

THE TAKE-AWAY

So next time you see a pair of Prada shoes for Reebok prices, make sure to

check the label to ensure you aren't buying Prados by mistake. Whether shopping for designer clothing or the latest ways to turn back the clock, consumers need guidance in ever-evolving markets. We can't fall prey to "industry myopia" and assume new patients have the right information to make a truly informed decision. By proactively building education into each patient visit, we can hopefully inject a more reliable decision-making process into the market. ■

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