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Botox at your dentist?

It's happening more and more. *By Dr. Susan Maples*

Q: I hear some dentists are offering Botox. How does that fit with dentistry?

A: Some medical professionals (including some dentists) have the opinion that administering Botox is outside our scope of practice--mostly because the treatment areas are outside the mouth. I think this drift toward non-surgical facial aesthetics follows a current progression. Traditionally, dentists were tooth carpenters, restoring mouths one tooth at a time. Today there is a wide range of expertise and offerings in dentistry, depending on the interests and advanced education of your dentist. The comprehensive restorative dentist looks at the head and neck as a whole: skull, muscles, joints, occlusion (bite), aesthetics and yes, facial expression!

So what is Botox? It is a natural purified protein that relaxes wrinkle-causing muscles, creating a smoothed facial appearance. It was discovered as a neurotoxin and in its controlled, purified form has been extremely therapeutic for children and adults with cerebral palsy, facial tics, writer's cramp and even long-term hiccups. Leading neurophysiologist Dr. Peter Misra reports there are no known long-term side effects and that Botox cosmetic is considered one of the safest injectables on the market

Is there demand? While some people find a naturally aging face beautiful to behold, others do not. Aging baby boomers seek more age-reversing cosmetic procedures than any other demographic--85% of these procedures are non-surgical, such as Botox, dermal fillers, hair removal and skin resurfacing. Botox leads in demand.

Why the dentist? We, as dentists, are head, neck and facial muscle experts. It makes sense to use Botox around the mouth to help reduce gummy smiles or aid in lip closure. But what about worry lines and crows feet? Therein lies the controversy. We are certainly tuned in to the myriad of facial aesthetic concerns—which doesn't imply that we need to treat them. Teaming up with a trusted plastic surgeon and dermatologist will help our patients learn ALL the options for their particular complaints.

On the other hand, there are some very thorough Botox Cosmetic training courses available to dentists. We already give safe and comfortable injections all day long, so most of us are just plain good at it. In or around the mouth we can use it to interrupt harmful habits such as tongue chewing, tongue thrust or inadequate lip closure. It's not a big stretch from there to relaxing frowning muscles and smoothing wrinkles in the forehead and eye area.

But is facial alteration considered *healthy*? Studies have shown that people who feel good about the way they look are happier, more successful, live more productive lives, make 18-20%

more income and have lower anxiety and depression. Happy people naturally smile more and research shows that exercising “positive muscles”- those used for smiling, immediately release endorphins to the brain. .

If you have an interest in non-surgical aesthetic procedures, ask your dentist. If it is outside his or her expertise, you can be sure you will leave with a trusted referral.