

Health

In your face, Botox

Unfurrow your brow and change your life! Nashville plastic surgeon Dr. Deborah Sherman is part of a marketing blitz to sell beauticians on the wonders of Botox, in hopes they'll talk it up to you.

By EMILY NIPPS

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Unfurrow that brow!
Visiting plastic surgeon Deborah Sherman says those lines above your nose make you look mad.



ST. PETERSBURG -- Are your wrinkles scaring your children? Hurting your sales? Ruining your marriage?

Imagine a life without creases around your eyes - a brow that stays smooth no matter how much you squint in the sun or how frustrated you feel in a budget meeting. Think of how relaxed you'll look, how much nicer you'll seem, how much closer we'll be to world peace.

Okay, maybe not, but at least you won't look so grim.

This is the dream pitched by cosmetic drugmaker Allergan, spread through a marketing tour of 10 cities, including a stop in St. Petersburg last week. Nashville plastic surgeon Dr. Deborah Sherman came to the Renaissance Vinoy Resort to tout the supposedly life-changing effects of a smoother forehead, meeting with about 200 Tampa Bay area beauticians and hairdressers. These beauty mavens and several journalists responded to a mass e-mail curiously titled, "RU a Victim of Facial Prejudice?"

It might seem like a stretch to assert that so many life problems begin with a furrowed brow and end with a shot of Botox. But Sherman - who is a longtime fan of the "purified protein"

not a poison, she insisted, as some in the media call Botulinum Toxin Type A - said she sees the tragic effects of wrinkly eyebrows all the time.

She analyzes more than 100 faces a week, she said, focusing mainly on the "11" - the two vertical lines that form over the bridge of the nose when one squints or frowns or thinks too hard about, say, clever marketing campaigns.

"I've had NFL coaches tell me, 'My players think I'm angry or worried when I talk to them,' or a teacher says, 'My kids think I'm mean,' " Sherman said.

"I've had salesmen say, 'I can't close a sale because of the way I look.' Teenagers and moms, husbands and wives ... a husband will say, 'Why are you mad?' and the wife will say, 'I'm not mad,' and he'll say, 'Well, you look mad ...' "

People thought no-fault divorce spelled the end of the American family, when all along it was the "11."

Life doesn't have to be that way, and Allergan was willing to send Sherman and a perky, wrinkle-free Botox-treated public relations team across the country to prove it. The idea behind the "educational campaign" was to dispel certain myths and misconceptions among the beauty community - stylists, nail techs, personal shoppers, anyone in the business of making other people look good - so that those people could pass the info on to their clients.

For skeptics, Allergan offered a complimentary Botox treatment at a qualified clinic, which carries a value of \$300 to 500 a pop.

This strategy seemed surprising to University of South Florida marketing professor Gary Gebhardt, since Botox isn't exactly new. "I would think that everyone knows what it is by now," he said.

Yet it makes sense to reach out to those whom people are most likely to confide in about their wrinkle woes. For example, when a woman asks her hairdresser to cut her bangs to hide her brow lines, that hairdresser can push the Botox if he or she has tried it. "Once you become a believer, you become an evangelist," Gebhardt said, and that's one of the tricks of buzz marketing.

The spammish "RU a Victim" e-mails and social generalizations might seem a tad trite for a medical product, but Sherman said people need to hear terms they understand. After all, "Lose the 11" has a much nicer ring to it than "eradicate the glabellar lines."

She recites cosmetic surgery slogans such as "Up is good, down is bad" (referring to skin elasticity) and "Parentheses have a place, but not on the face" (for lines around the mouth).

Gebhardt frowned upon these catch phrases, no doubt creating unsightly lines around his eyes that will cost \$500 to get rid of.

"Quite honestly, the pitch is very old school, and a little annoying," he said.

"They're basically preying on people's fears, and it kind of reminds me of that old adage, 'Boys don't make passes at girls who wear glasses.' "

Wait till the lasik people get ahold of that one.

Emily Nipps can be reached at (813) 269-5313 or nipps@sptimes.com.

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