

MASTERING THE ART OF
THE AESTHETIC CONSULT

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As a medical aesthetics practitioner, your ability to positively impact the lives of your patients has never been greater. Advances in aesthetics mean that consumers are now able to achieve superior enhancement with less downtime, discomfort, cost, or inconvenience than ever before.

But the reality is, clients cannot experience your expertise if you are unable to obtain their trust and interest. Once a potential client is in your office, you must convince them that you are the perfect provider for their procedure.

Getting a "yes" from a prospective patient requires you—and everyone at your practice—to master the art of the **aesthetic consult**. This report will give you a strong foundation to help you develop your own best practices.

The insights are drawn from Venus Concept's experience partnering with the most successful aesthetic practitioners in over 60 countries. Venus offers practitioners groundbreaking innovation in energy-based aesthetic technology, as well as unparalleled support and commitment to ongoing practice enhancement.



THE AESTHETIC CONSULT BEGINS LONG BEFORE THE APPOINTMENT

The success of an aesthetic consultation may be decided long before your prospective patient arrives for their appointment. Consumers begin forming impressions of your abilities, integrity, and trustworthiness from the moment they hear or see your name.

It's important to understand the mindset of your patient. Patient fear and uncertainly are perhaps your biggest challenges. Many people have heard horror stories from friends, colleagues, and television. They worry that a suboptimal result is not only possible, but *probable*. Your ability to establish trust through your expertise, manner, office environment, and documented positive outcomes are paramount.

CREATE THE IMAGE OF YOUR PRACTICE THAT YOU WANT TO CONVEY

How you position your practice through marketing contributes to shaping your patient's aesthetic consult. This positioning, often called branding, establishes patient expectations and creates an image for your office.

When done well, branding can be a great service for consumers because it enables you to communicate key information, including:

- An accurate idea of the services you provide
- The ideal consumer for your services
- How your practice stands out from other providers
- Your areas of training and expertise
- How patients can expect to be treated in your office

In this way, strong branding strategies help consumers make informed choices that they can feel confident about. Good branding helps to ease patient anxiety about what they might experience when they visit your clinic.



Branding is a nuanced art, and we will only touch on the basics here. This crucial step covers the way you represent your practice through such attributes as the office location, décor, name, slogan, logo, and with design elements like color, typeface, and more. Branding choices affect how you come across to potential patients—for instance, as discreet, bespoke, or even with a particular audience in mind (such as a youthful clientele seeking to delay signs of aging).

Consistency in this presentation is key. Patients will get confused if you promote yourself based on price one week, and based on your luxe spa-like experience the next. From office décor and client interactions, to your website, social media, and other marketing initiatives, your branding should be consistent.

Often, your first impression to patients will be through your website. It's important that your website does a good job of representing your practice to potential patients, and providing information about treatments and experience. If you have any doubt about whether your website will leave a positive impression, have it evaluated by an expert.

Another way that patients form impressions of you is through review sites such as Yelp or RealSelf.com. These sites are widely read (especially by younger consumers), and multiple negative reviews can be a kiss of death for your practice. Your marketing team should monitor these sites regularly, respond constructively to comments, and establish a campaign to generate good reviews.

CONCEPTUALIZING YOUR SERVICE OFFERINGS

Patients today are often well-versed in the subtleties of different injectables and the latest device developments. This information overflow has increased the number of prospective patients shopping for a specific service as if it were a commodity.

This tendency generally has a downward pressure on pricing and profitability, and also influences the patient experience. If a patient has decided to shop for a syringe of neurotoxin, you may have already lost the opportunity to apply your expertise in suggesting and facilitating treatments that might better achieve the desired outcome.

Not every practice has the luxury of getting away from pricing by commoditized service. However, wherever possible, give thought to defining your service offerings by procedures and outcomes (such as facial rejuvenation or body contouring). This gives you a greater ability to combine and tailor treatments to the consumer's precise presentation, achieve superior results, price appropriately, and make your practice unique from competitors.



FROM FIRST CONTACT TO APPOINTMENT

Once a patient has decided to explore your services, every interaction must facilitate the journey to a "yes."

This usually begins with the prospective patient's first phone call to your office. Of course, every call must be answered promptly by a friendly voice. Scheduling should be straightforward—some patients may be ready to set up an appointment right away.

Patients may also have questions about your procedures and prices. Always handle this step with great care; your first communication will go a long way to solidifying their expectations in terms of trustworthiness, outcome, and cost.

Staff members are ambassadors for your practice, so staff training is crucial. You may even find that anything beyond the most routine questions should be handled by a specially trained staff member or patient care coordinator. A care coordinator is, to a large extent, a sales person. They must not only offer a deep understanding of treatments but represent your practice's philosophy.

SHOULD YOU CHARGE FOR AN INITIAL CONSULT?

Depending on your market and service offerings, you may want to charge at least a nominal fee for the aesthetic consult appointment.

An advantage of charging these fees is that it increases the perceived value of your services, weeding out potential no-shows, lowest-price shoppers, or unmotivated buyers. Some practices find that it increases the conversion rate of prospective patients. In addition, it makes good business sense to at least cover your overhead for 30 to 60 minutes of valuable staff or provider time.

However, this practice is most common in clinics that offer cosmetic surgery as well as non-invasive treatments, and may meet resistance among patients interested in entry-level treatments.

The drawback of charging for an initial consult is that you may deter some prospective patients, including those tentative consumers who would otherwise be persuaded to move forward by the expertise and care on display in your office.

One way to counter this is by offering to apply the consult fee to their first treatment. Alternatively, you can offer current patients cards for free consults so they can refer friends. Since those referrals are likely to already have a positive view of your practice, those consults are likely to turn into treatments.



Once a patient decides to give your practice a chance, it's time to focus on making a stellar first impression. While critical interactions take place before your prospective patient ever reaches your office, it is equally important to make an impact on the client from the moment they walk through the door. Your goal is to establish your expertise and trustworthiness, using every avenue available to you.

If you've done your job well, the patient will want to take the next step and visit your office for a consultation. Between the prospective patient's arrival and their initial interaction with the treatment provider, small details can make a big difference in the patient's decision.

THE SUBTLE PSYCHOLOGY OF AESTHETICS CONSUMERS

Increasing the conversion rate of your aesthetic consultations—the proportion of consults that leads to paid services—requires a strong understanding of your target audience's psychology.

You know that consumers approach aesthetic services both with the hope that they will achieve their desired results, and trepidation that something could go wrong or that their provider lacks expertise. That is why the overriding objective of the aesthetic consult is to display your knowledge, professionalism, and trustworthiness.

Remember, the typical aesthetics consumer has a full schedule and a busy life. So while convenience isn't *everything*, it is still an incredibly important attribute to potential customers.

MAKE A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION, FROM PARKING TO CHECK-IN

First impressions are formed quickly. Research studies show that it can take as little as less than one second to solidify your first impression. In other words, you need to start off on the right foot with new consumers every time. Once a prospective patient decides to come in for a consultation, their initial impression begins to take shape the second they arrive.

A 2014 study published in the *Journal of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons*¹ analyzed consumer preferences in choosing aesthetics clinics. They found that, at 14.2 percent, travel time was the third most important variable in consumers' selection (years of experience was first).

¹ Marsidi N, van den Bergh MW, Luijendijk RW. The best marketing strategy in aesthetic plastic surgery: Evaluating patients' preferences by conjoint analysis. Plast Reconstr Surg. 2014;133:52–57



This is important to bear in mind when choosing your office location. Is your building easily accessible from the neighborhoods that your patients are likely to live or work? Is traffic frequently snarled in your area? Are there transit options nearby? Is your building easy to find and identify?

Parking is also important. If prospective patients drive to your office, try to ensure that they are not forced to hunt for a place to park. Ideally, you should have plentiful street parking, a dedicated parking lot, or spots in a shared facility. Validating patients' parking receipts so they can use a nearby paid lot for free is another solution that can endear you to potential customers.

Essentially, it comes down to making an active effort to ensure that potential patients arrive for their appointment on time, stress-free, and confident in their choice of provider. If they walk in the door harried and unhappy, you are already at a disadvantage.

CONSUMERS FORM OPINIONS ABOUT YOUR EXPERTISE FROM SUBTLE CUES

Maximize the first impression of your office. Most aesthetics patients do not have the expertise to evaluate your clinical skills, so they put heavy weight on subtle cues that speak to your abilities and value proposition.

Cast a fresh eye on your office's curb appeal. Your signage, exterior, and entry should be inviting. It should communicate what you do and what your brand stands for. If anything seems dated, cheap, or dingy, that will negatively affect the new patient's assessment—even if they aren't consciously aware of it.

Ensure the overall look of your office is reassuring, memorable, and pleasant. Professional design can be a worthwhile (and even essential) investment. A designer will make sure your signage, colors, finishes, lighting, and furnishings coherently convey a message that aligns with your office objectives.

CHECK-IN IS THE CLIENT'S ENTRÉE TO YOUR WORLD

The potential patient's next stop on their journey is check-in. This will most likely be their first in-person encounter with a member of your staff, so it is a critical interaction. It is imperative that the receptionist is friendly, greets each person as they arrive, and makes eye contact. This seems obvious, but it is often not the case.

Each person should be acknowledged within a few seconds of walking in the door. Even if front desk staff members are otherwise occupied, this can be as easy as simply looking up, making eye contact, and saying, "I'll be right with you," when a new patient enters. The sooner you can connect with them and get them settled in, the less nervous they will be.



You don't want newcomers to wait more than a minute or two at check-in, and pile-ups around the reception desk should especially be avoided. If a short delay is unavoidable for some reason, the receptionist should ensure that seating is available, and help customers get comfortable while they wait. As soon as possible, the receptionist should come out from behind the desk, find the patient, and invite them to come check in. Each of these actions speaks to how much your practice values each individual it serves. It makes a powerful impression on the prospective patient.

Some offices have even gone so far as to eliminate reception and waiting rooms entirely. Instead, they have an assistant who greets patients at the door and escorts them immediately to exam or treatment rooms. This frees up space for additional service areas and enhances privacy and a sense of individual attention.

Either way, consider it from the perspective of the patient: Would you feel more cared for if you experienced an impersonal process designed for the convenience of the staff, or if you were treated as an individual whose time and feelings mattered?

Greeting new customers should always be included in staff training (and retraining). As busy as staff may be, it only takes a few moments to give patients a warm welcome, and it makes a world of difference.

FORMS AND WAITING ROOMS OFFER OPPORTUNITIES TO CONVINCE CONSUMERS

Typically, the first thing a new patient does in your office is filling out intake forms. These are necessary, but can still be a bit tedious. Most clinics make these forms available on their websites, so patients can fill them out in advance at their convenience. Make sure forms are clear and easy to read. Avoid asking for the same information more than once.

Another approach is offering tablets for patients to enter their information in your office. This immediately digitizes the information, reinforces the notion that your office is fully up-to-date, improves efficiency, offers greater privacy, cuts costs on paper, and saves staff time. Check-in can also be done with self-service kiosks using this technology.

Once the new patient has cleared those hurdles, they may have a few minutes to wait. Waiting should always be kept to a minimum; in a 2014 U.S. study of physician offices, researchers found that patient confidence in the provider and perceived quality were negatively correlated with wait time.² Moreover, a 2015 study of 394 dermatology offices reported that patients identified in-office wait time as the primary

² Bleustein C, Rothschild DB, Valen A, Valatis E, Schweitzer L, Jones R. Wait times, patient satisfaction scores, and the perception of care. Am J Manag Care. 2014;20(5):393-400.



area that needed to improve for better patient satisfaction,³ while another study showed that satisfaction declined from 93.1 percent with a wait of five minutes or less to 80 percent after 30 minutes of waiting.⁴

If waiting is inevitable, ensure that your waiting room offers a pleasant experience all the same. The size and layout of your waiting room can send different messages to your customers. A large waiting room implies that it's the norm to wait a long time in your office, and sitting in a crowd of other waiting individuals lends the impression that your practice is impersonal. As well, comfortable and attractive seating is a must. Varied seating types beyond the same stiff set of chairs offer options for people of different ages and body types, and it makes everyone feel more welcome and comfortable.

USE DÉCOR AND DESIGN TO ENHANCE YOUR OFFICE EXPERIENCE

Helping patients to relax while they wait will go a long way in reassuring them before a consultation. In the waiting room and reception area, the right artwork and statement pieces can create a pleasant memorable impression, and plants and good lighting can create a soothing atmosphere. Natural light and windows with a view outside will also help to ease anxiety.

Other essentials include a variety of recent reading material, such as magazines, and reliable free Wi-Fi. Amenities, such as coffee, tea, bottled drinks, or spa water (water beautifully enhanced with slices of fresh lemon, cucumber, or berries) are a nice touch.

The waiting area also offers an opportunity to communicate your expertise and trustworthiness. Without looking too cluttered, consider displaying any degrees, awards, recognitions, and photos of patient success stories. Display information on your treatments, including videos that orient the patient to office procedures, what to expect, positive patient testimonials, and details on additional services. Make an easily-accessible retail sales display of any products you sell, such as skin care lines.

By setting the groundwork set for a positive patient experience from the moment that a prospective patient arrives in your office, you help to pave the way for a successful aesthetic consult. The interactions that follow are even more decisive in a successful outcome.

³ Press Ganey Associates, Inc. Medical practice pulse report: patient perspectives on American health care. http://www.pressganey.com/researchResources/medicalPractices/pulseReports.aspx.

⁴ Press Ganey Associates, Inc. Medical practice satisfaction: mean section score for "overall assessment" questions on the medical practice survey. National Quality Measures Clearinghouse (NQMC) measure submission form. 2011:21-24.



The process of building trust with the patient during the aesthetics consult is both delicate and critical. It is important to ensure that you and your new patient are in alignment on needs and goals.

THE ONE-ON-ONE CONSULTATION IS A MOMENT OF PATIENT VULNERABILITY

Depending on the size and type of practice, the aesthetics consult may be conducted (at least in part) by a treatment coordinator, aesthetician, or other staff member. If that person will not be providing the patient's treatment, it's imperative that there is an opportunity for the patient to meet the actual provider during the consultation visit. The principles covered here apply to all of these one-on-one interactions.

Before getting under way, pause for a moment to put yourself in the shoes of your prospective patient. In this appointment, the patient will likely tell you what most bothers them about their appearance; they will likely feel exposed and vulnerable. Patients may feel nervous and anxious at this point for other reasons. They worry about being judged or misunderstood, or that your skills and expertise are inadequate, or that they face the potential of a bad outcome, or that the results will not be commensurate with what they spend. Your attitude and response will have a huge impact on relieving these concerns, ultimately shaping their experiences and decision.

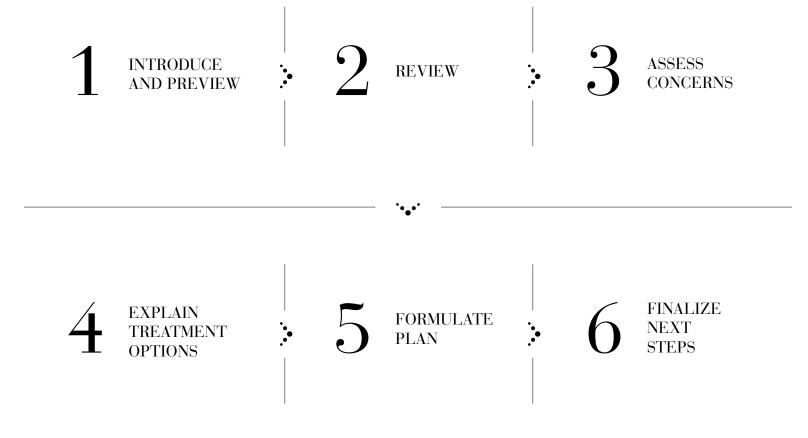
HAVE A STANDARD PROCEDURE

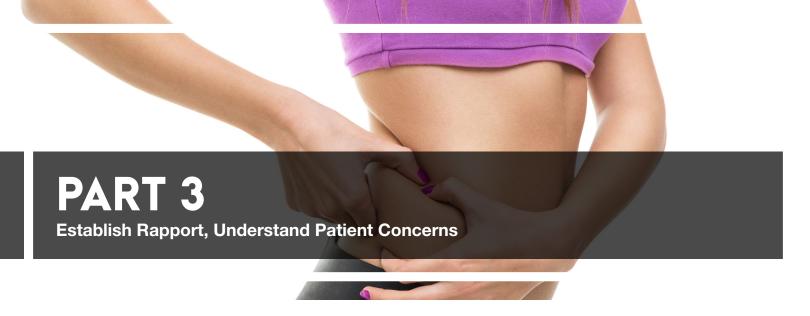
Since everything you do and say in this meeting is significant, it's not the time to improvise. Develop a clearly defined procedure for aesthetic consultations, shaped by your personal office philosophy and mode of operation — there is no one "right" way to structure a consultation.

What's important is that you approach the consultation in a highly intentional way. Define how you want this interaction to flow, then follow the process consistently for each consultation. Many successful providers spend an hour in this consultation, but that will vary depending on the treatments you offer and the concerns of the patient. Throughout, using a mirror or photos can help you both visualize and confirm that you are on the same page.



STEPS TO SUCCESS: SIX KEY ELEMENTS OF THE AESTHETICS CONSULTATION





1 INTRODUCE AND PREVIEW

Generally, the best way to start is to shake hands, introduce yourself, highlight your experience and qualifications (or those of the clinic), and explain the order of events in the consultation. Let the patient know what will happen during their time with you, the kind of information they can anticipate receiving from you, and how it will conclude.

$2\,$ review

Next, review the patient's intake form with them, getting more detail and elaboration on anything that is unclear. This can be a review both of medical history and of any previous aesthetic procedures.

\mathfrak{Z} assess concerns

Now, it's time to listen. The best way to transition to this part of the consult is to ask an open-ended question such as, "What brings you here today?" This part of the consultation should account for more than half of your time together to ensure you understand and are on the same page as the potential patient.

While it may seem self-evident, do not assume you know where the patient's narrative is going or how they feel about their appearance. The patient should be doing most of the talking in this part of the interview.

Studies have shown that primary care doctors tend to allow patients to talk no more than 12 to 18 seconds⁵ before interrupting. That behavior will sabotage the relationship between patient and aesthetics provider. Patient satisfaction is the primary goal of aesthetics treatment, and listening enables you to understand what will best satisfy the patient. To do this, you will need to explore the patient's goals, motivations, and expectations within a relationship of trust.

"Communication breakdown is common," aesthetic specialists wrote in the Journal of Cosmetic Dermatology in March 2017. "This can occur when the physician's focus is on delivering treatments or their own aesthetic tastes rather than on the patient's concerns, preferences, desires, and values."

In other words, breakdowns happen and patients are disappointed when aesthetics practitioners impose their preferences and ideas of beauty on the patient. Remember: It's not about you!

⁵ Rhodes D, McFarland KF, Finch WH, Johnson AO. Speaking and interruptions during primary care office visits. Family Med-Kansas City. 2001;33(7):528–32.

⁶ Jain, R., Huang, P. and Ferraz, R. M. (2017), A new tool to improve delivery of patient-engaged care and satisfaction in facial treatments: the Aesthetic Global Ranking Scale. J Cosmet Dermatol, 16: 132–143. doi:10.1111/jocd.12297



Researchers have concluded that most patient dissatisfaction stems from poor communication and patient selection criteria, rather than technical failings. ^{7,8} You can combat this by taking advantage of simple tools to assess prospective patients' concerns with their current appearance and issues underlying patient satisfaction with minimally invasive treatments. These include the SAGA history, ⁹ and the Global Ranking Scale ¹⁰ developed by 18 aesthetic experts and used since 2014 in practices in Europe, Brazil, Australia, South Korea, and Taiwan.

This is a great time to employ reflective listening skills while talking to the patient, in which you paraphrase what you've heard and repeat it back to them. This shows the patient that you are listening closely and giving them the opportunity to confirm or clarify any misunderstanding. Example phrases might include, "I am hearing that your main concern is the area around your eyes and that people often comment that you look tired, am I right?"¹¹

WATCH FOR RED FLAGS

As you move through this process with your prospective patient, it's wise to be alert for signs that an individual may not be suitable for treatment for one of many reasons, which can include unrealistic expectations and/or a personality type that suggests they may be litigious or impossible to satisfy.

Some red flags include those patients who bring in pictures of celebrities, patients who complain about practitioners whom they have seen previously, or patients who exhibit signs of reckless indecisiveness or impulsivity.

However, photos, when used properly, can be a valuable tool in an initial consultation with a patient.

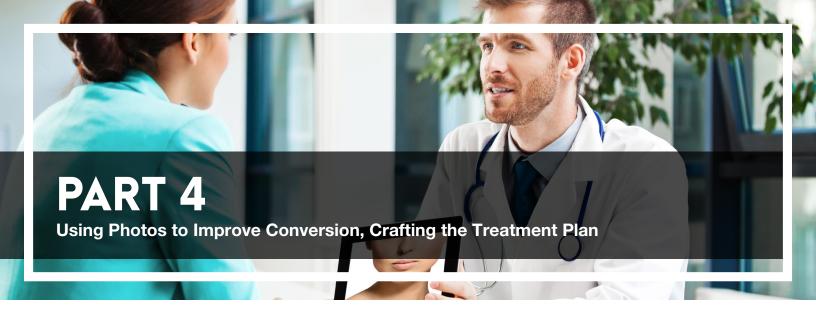
⁷ Ward CM. Consenting and consulting for cosmetic surgery. Br J Plast Surg 1998;51:547e 50

⁸ Gorney M. (2004) Essentials of malpractice claims prevention for the plastic surgeon. eMedicine; Jan5, 2004

⁹ Blackburn VF, Blackburn AV. Taking a history in aesthetic surgery: SAGA — the surgeon's tool for patient selection. J Plast Reconstr Aesthet Surg. 2008;61:723-729.

¹⁰ Jain, R., Huang, P. and Ferraz, R. M. (2017), A new tool to improve delivery of patient-engaged care and satisfaction in facial treatments: the Aesthetic Global Ranking Scale. J Cosmet Dermatol, 16: 132–143. doi:10.1111/jocd.12297

¹¹ Rimmer, E. (2016) Providing Competent and Valuable Consultations. Aesthetics Journal Online. Accessed at https://aestheticsjournal.com/feature/providing-competent-and-valuable-consultations



Now that you have begun to form a clear idea of what the patient wants, using photos can help you create a treatment plan that delivers a successful outcome and motivates patients to proceed with treatment. This is the crucial stage of the consultation, when you seek to get patients to commit to the treatment plan.

PHOTOS ARE POWERFUL AND INFLUENTIAL

In aesthetic practices, photos and videos are proven assets to the patient journey in multiple ways. They help to clarify concerns, demonstrate expertise, document baselines, and record progress. Images make a greater impression on many people than words.

Several practices report success with asking patients to bring to the consultation a photo of themselves at a time when they loved how they looked. It can be an icebreaker and conversation starter, and it also helps them convey their own perception of their attractive qualities, and what they would like to enhance. This photo, which generally dates from a younger period, can also give the practitioner an idea of what the patient's naturally more youthful appearance would look like.

Many clinics take pictures at the start of the consult. Of course, you must make sure that the patient signs a consent form. Establish a procedure so that lighting, angles, and framing are as consistent as possible. Truly standardized photos, which can be directly compared to one another without distortion from different lighting or angles, require a dedicated spot for photo-taking with high-quality cameras, controlled lighting, and tripods.

Depending on the scope of your practice, you may want to invest in a camera and lighting system purpose-built for cosmetic photography with track- or dolly-mounted cameras and motorized background. New all-in-one pod units with patient seats and camera arms are available on the market as well.

The wonders of technology have given us programs and devices that manipulate images to show expected aging progression and regression, as well as visualize potential enhancements. Touchscreens allow patients and practitioners to draw on images to point out concerns and illustrate conditions.

This level of sophistication can be expensive. You may instead decide to rely on a smartphone or tablet for picture taking. If you do, there are apps and solutions designed for the aesthetic industry that help you achieve consistent positioning. These applications also typically manage and chart photos so they can be added to the patient's record.

In the aesthetic consult, having photos available on a screen or mobile device will enable you and the patient to refer to them during the assessment of concerns.



USING PHOTOS IN THE DISCUSSION WITH YOUR PATIENT

In the consult, ask the patient to point out specific areas of concern on the photos. You may also zoom in on particular features in the photos. This can help you understand exactly what the patient means when they say they think they look a certain way, such as "tired." In return, you can help the patient see beyond a specific symptom, such as showing how under-eye bags that bother them are accentuated by volume loss in the temples, contributing to a droopy appearance.

Having the patient assess their photo with you can give you important indications of how realistic their expectations are, and whether or not they suffer from body image distortion.

Photos are also important to establish a baseline so that you and the patient can assess progress and changes over time, as patients can quickly become used to their enhanced appearance and forget how they looked before treatment. They can also be helpful in case of complaints, and possibly even help fend off a lawsuit.

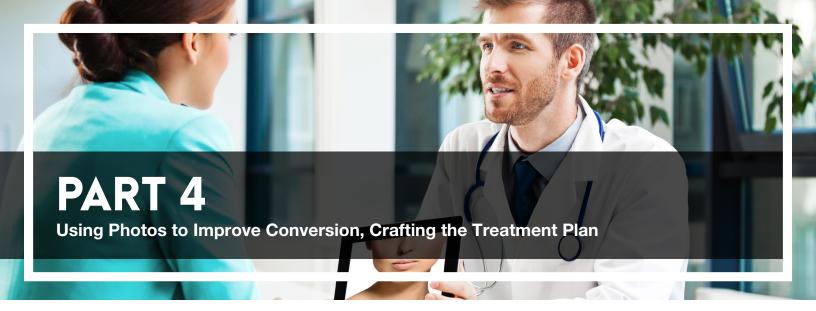
"I once conducted a dermal filler procedure to correct a patient's jawline—results were wonderful. However, in the follow-up consultation, the patient accused me of creating a lateral deviation in her chin. I showed her a standardized before-video and she could clearly see that her chin was deviated before the procedure. My patient was finally happy, apologized, and I did not face a risk of being sued," Dr. Emmanuel Elard reported in Aesthetics Journal.¹²

Some practitioners like Elard are trying video to show the effects of procedures such as botulinum toxin in an animated, dynamic way.

USING PHOTOS FOR BEFORE-AND-AFTER COMPARISONS

Another major benefit of photography in the aesthetic consultation is the use of before-and-after photos from your actual patients. Use photos from your own patients and treatments wherever possible (provided that you have their written consent). Your own before-and-after pictures give a vivid illustration of your expertise and realistically manage patient expectations of results.

¹² Elard, Emmanuel The Last Word: Standardised Photography, Aesthetics Journal, Dec. 23, 2016. Retrieved from https://aestheticsjournal.com/feature/the-last-word-standardised-photography



In a survey by review site RealSelf.com of 1,039 consumers considering cosmetic surgery, 69 percent said they need to see 11 or more sets of photos to confidently pick a procedure. That number is even higher (77 percent) if they are using photos to choose a doctor. Of that group, the majority expressed a desire for at least 30 sets of photos. When choosing a procedure, 29 percent of respondents said they want 30 or more before-and-after sets. That number is 26 percent when picking a doctor.

In terms of what was most important in before-and-after photos, the respondents said: seeing someone who looks like themselves (28 percent), seeing a range of outcomes including outcomes that aren't as good (27 percent), and knowing specifics about the case, such as age or treatment details (25 percent).

FORMULATING AND DISCUSSING A TREATMENT PLAN

At this point in the consult, you and the patient are ready to begin discussing a treatment plan that will address the problems they identified and the underlying causes.

Consumers today are very well-informed about aesthetic procedures, and may come seeking a specific procedure or therapy. Short-term and symptom-focused treatments do provide immediate results, so you don't want to skip them. But both the patient and the practice are best-served by a strategy that improves their concerns *holistically*. For example, even if the customer simply requests a syringe of filler, the whole face cannot be ignored in favour of the lips alone. This approach helps to achieve a more natural and even result, and it meshes with the trend for consumers to embrace regular touch-ups, tweaks, and interventions, rather than viewing aesthetic treatments as limited to middle age. More consumers in their 20s are looking to aesthetic practitioners in the hope of delaying the signs of aging. They are the ideal group to educate through this holistic approach.

This kind of treatment plan will probably entail combining different modalities and multiple visits. These benefit the patient by providing more significant and longer-lasting results and strengthening their relationship with the provider or clinic. At the same time, you gain opportunities to offer more expensive services and create a pipeline of repeat visits.

Diagrams, drawings, and photo tools can help you detail the recommendations. You may want to offer a one-page sheet for the patient to take home, summarizing the recommendations, timeline, and cost. You can also provide manufacturer literature and websites for them to review later.

¹³ Kramer, Elisabeth Before & After Photos: More Is Better, Say Plastic Surgery Patients, Feb. 10, 2016. Retrieved from https://trends.realself.com/2016/02/10/how-many-before-after-photos/

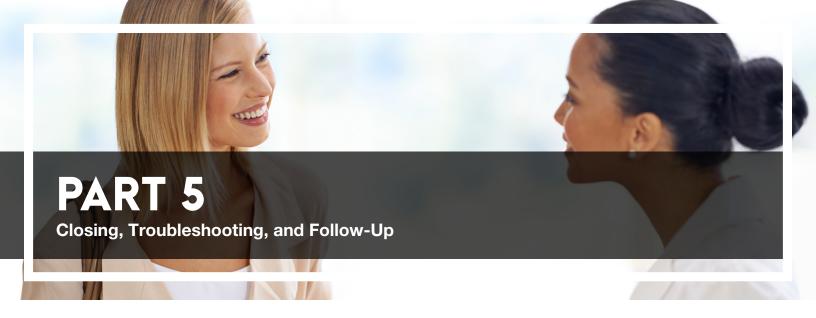


Laying out more than one course of treatment can help give patients a greater sense of choice and readiness while selecting treatments. One might be a minimal recommendation, and the other might be the "ideal plan" that fully addresses their concerns. You can also divide the recommended treatments into time phases, thus giving patients an opportunity to see the program as an evolving relationship with a step-by-step commitment, rather than feeling compelled to over-commit immediately.

As you lay out options, be honest and forthcoming about negatives, including any pain and recovery time. Inform the patient on a range of potential outcomes—even those less successful than anticipated. Discuss the frequency or risks, and what you can do to remediate or mitigate them. Make sure the patient understands their options and risks. Not only is this ethical and necessary for informed consent, but it also reinforces your trustworthiness. Undersell and over-deliver is a wise policy.

Depending on the expense and complexity involved, this point in the consultation may also be an appropriate moment to discuss financing options, or at least to mention that they exist. Once you have covered the material fully, give the patient an opportunity to agree to the plan and commit to an appointment. You do not want to apply undue pressure, but it is appropriate to try to close the sale. Consider offering the patient an incentive, such as a bonus or free product, to help them commit before they leave. You can also offer them choices, if appropriate, to pay upfront and receive an additional treatment or to pay over time without a bonus.

There are many ways to move forward if a patient isn't quite ready to make a decision, or an appointment requires follow-up and troubleshooting. Read on to find a list of common reasons why patients might not convert to treatment, and how to address these hesitations.



It is important for patients to commit to the treatment plan. If they cannot come to a decision, take the time to understand the sources of their hesitations, and how to deal with their concerns.

THE FINAL STAGE: GETTING TO YES

At this point, you are nearing the end of the consultation appointment. If you have laid the groundwork well, the patient is enthusiastic about committing to the next step. Before leaving your office, they will book an appointment for their first procedure.

However, some people might still be hesitating at this juncture. Your job is to understand their reservations and address them. Some aesthetic practitioners feel awkward about this, fearing it veers toward the hard sell. While some unscrupulous clinics may focus on revenue alone, most offices view this part of the consultation as an essential step to providing personalized care, by making sure that patients are offered the right services for their individual needs. Patients generally appreciate this approach.

As a patient-centered practitioner, you owe it to them to understand why they may be holding back. If this hesitation stems from a misunderstanding or inadequate information, you can address it and allay concerns. While your prospective patient may ultimately have their own good reasons to decide against a particular treatment, do your best to ensure that their choices are uncolored by inaccurate or incomplete understanding.

GAINING INSIGHT INTO THE MINDSET OF THE PATIENT WHO HOLDS BACK

Earlier in the consultation, you listened to the prospective patient's aesthetic concerns and goals. You ascertained that the treatment plan is appropriate for the patient, and you sought to ensure they understood the procedure, results, risks, and benefits.

Through your efforts to connect and build rapport with the prospective patient as a person, you should have a good idea at this stage about why they are considering treatment. Using this insight, explore their concerns and help them work through them. Use reflective listening and careful questions to get them to discuss their reservations more fully. For example:

- "What I hear is that..."
- "It sounds like you think/are concerned about ... Is that correct?"
- "Does that sound about right?"
- "Is there anything else?"

Two broad approaches that help patients connect to their motivation are:

- Reminding them of their emotional involvement in improving their appearance; and
- Framing your response with the "Feel, Felt, Found" technique.



ENHANCING THE PATIENT'S EMOTIONAL INVESTMENT IN AESTHETIC IMPROVEMENT

The emotional involvement interchange is similar to the discussion you had with the prospective patient at the beginning of the consultation. If they are hesitating, revisit the positive impact associated with having the procedure, and try to elicit any non-rational fears or concerns they may have. You can do that with questions like, How do you envision having this procedure might impact your life?; What might change if this issue wasn't bothering you anymore?; How will it feel to no longer be embarrassed by this issue?; and What is it worth to you to no longer be self-conscious about this issue?

THE "FEEL, FELT, FOUND" TECHNIQUE

"Feel, Felt, Found" is a longstanding strategy for responding to objections and nudging clients forward. As the name suggests, there are three steps.

FEEL

Communicate that you heard what the patient said and can relate.

- "Jane, I know how you feel."
- "Tom, I understand what you are feeling."
- "Susan, I heard your fears and I understand them."

FELT

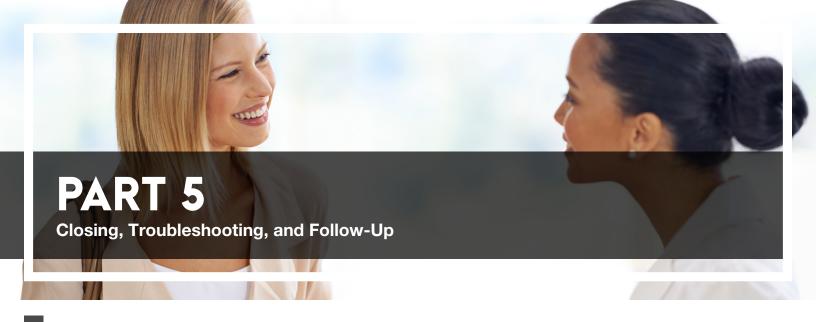
Tell them that others have experienced this feeling in the beginning, too, signaling it's something that can change.

- "Initially, a lot of our patients felt the same way you do."
- "Many patients shared your concerns, but they all found that the results speak for themselves."

FOUND

Inform them that others in the past who followed the recommendation were very happy with the outcome.

- "What they found was that they were thrilled with the result, and actually wished they had done it sooner."
- "Jane, I've had this procedure myself, and I found that I love how I look in the mirror."
- "So many people have come back and told me they feel so much better now."



COUNTERING SPECIFIC REASONS WHEN PATIENTS HESITATE

Sometimes, prospective patients face specific or concrete obstacles to a treatment. Let's explore some of the reasons patients are reluctant to schedule treatments, and how to address them.

1. TREATMENT COST

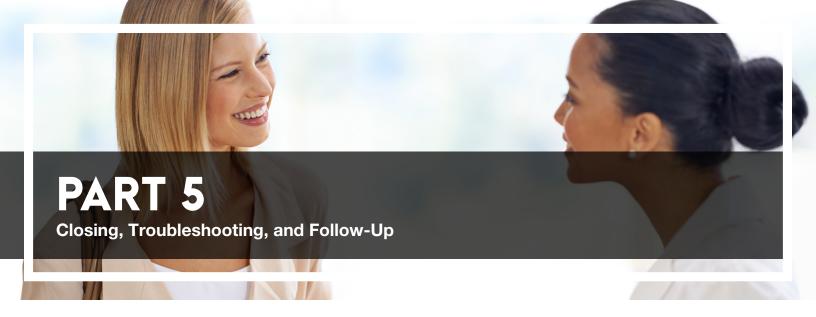
Other sections of this guide suggested prequalifying patients, so hopefully you have not reached this stage of the consultation if the consumer is not financially prepared. Thus, we will focus on financial considerations related to value. Explain to the prospective patient that pricing reflects the practitioner's expertise and skill, and emphasize experience as well as the quality of equipment and facilities. You can point to your great reputation, and note that discounting among aesthetic practitioners may reflect a less-qualified provider. Remind them of the unique aspects of your practice: "To get a result that you'll be happy with, you want someone with expertise. Saving a little money at the expense of the result you want would be a false economy." You can make the treatment plan more attractive by offering extra value; introduce this with the phrase "what if." For instance: "Jane, I know you're going to love the result. I'd love you to say yes today so that you can look forward to that. What if we could include the follow-up skin care regimen at half price?"

2. LACK OF TRUST IN PRACTITIONER OR STAFF

Sometimes patients don't feel a connection with the practitioner or care coordinator. During the aesthetic consultation, it usually results from poor communication—the staff member does all the talking without listening to the patient, or barrages the patient with policies and fees, rather than encouraging dialogue. Sometimes it's because the session is too rushed, and the patient did not warm up enough to discuss all of their concerns. Brush up on your rapport-building skills, including finding ways to engage with the patient as a person. Use body language to enhance closeness, such as sitting side-by-side or lower than the patient. Ask open-ended questions and reassure the patient that they are in good hands. You may also want to work on office management so you don't run behind and feel pressure to rush.

3. ABSENCE OF FAMILY SUPPORT

Some procedures, such as aesthetic surgery, may require post-op care. Even for treatments that involve no downtime, patients need to feel comfortable about their choice to have a procedure. Lack of support, or even opposition from, a spouse or other family member can make it very hard for an individual to pursue treatment that they want. This can be difficult to overcome, but you can explore alternatives with the patient. If they communicate that their partner is not on board the idea of them having a treatment, you can ask the patient if they have another friend or family member available to help. You can also suggest the patient bring a spouse or friend to the consultation, so you have an opportunity to address their concerns as well. Suggest a follow-up consultation if needed.



4. DISSATISFACTION WITH TREATMENT PLAN

If you were listening carefully when they discussed the reasons for their visit, the treatment plan you outlined should align with the patient's expectations. If you recommended different or more treatments than what the patient was expecting, they can feel overwhelmed, or even insulted if they perceive that you found excessive appearance defects. Handle this situation with sensitivity. When you go over the treatment recommendations, explain tactfully how achieving the desired result may require taking additional steps beyond those they had in mind. It's a job of gentle education so the patient gains a more nuanced understanding, rather than feeling that you want to change too much. And as we mentioned earlier in the guide, avoid imposing your own ideas of beauty on the patient.

5. CONCERN ABOUT SAFETY

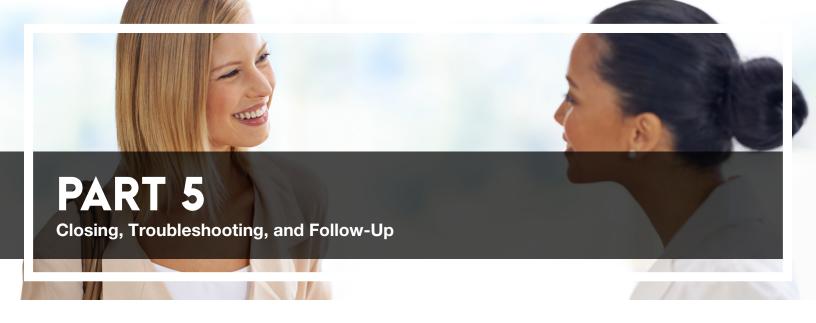
You will have covered this in your explanation of the treatment plan, but remember that patients have been exposed to television shows and tabloid articles centered on aesthetic treatments gone wrong. They fear terrible outcomes. Assuage concerns with concrete, factual information. Remind patients about the practitioner's experience and expertise, along with the safety record and regulatory approvals for devices and therapies. Refer to your practice's low rate of complications or suboptimal results to help attest to a positive track record.

6. CONCERN ABOUT DISCOMFORT

Patients worry about painful procedures. Show empathy, take these concerns seriously, and find out the person's pain tolerance. Discuss options for alleviating discomfort during and after the procedure. Let them know how most people respond: "Generally, most patients only feel a slight tingling. But for those who are very sensitive, we use a numbing cream so there is no pain whatsoever." Remind them that the practitioner will be checking in frequently during the treatment, and will be responsive to any complaint about discomfort. Some patients may find it reassuring to see the treatment bed, protective eye gear, squeeze balls, and other items that they will encounter during the procedure.

7. CONCERN ABOUT DOWNTIME OR SCHEDULING

It is important to find appointment times that fit patients' lives. If patients will require downtime after treatment, that imposes another hurdle for scheduling. Sometimes, putting exercise temporarily on hold or avoiding the sun will interfere with patient habits, activities, or workout routines. There is no one easy solution to these complications, but be sure to ask the client when they make the consultation appointment if they are working around a special date or event (wedding, reunion, etc.). If the timeline is impossible, save everyone the frustration by informing them in advance. Ideally, do not make the patient wait too long for an appointment that fits their schedule, or else they may decide against the treatment or find another provider.



8. WORRY ABOUT THE RESULT

Your prospective patient has received a lot of information during the consultation, and they may be worrying about how the treatment will actually turn out. Will they be happy with the result? What if they regret it? Again, your best strategy is reassurance—both about your track record in achieving great outcomes, and the patient's judgment when they initially opted to explore the treatment. One of the best ways to do that is to match the new patient with an existing one who has had the same procedure. That gives them an opportunity to hear about the experience first-hand. Before consultations, compile a list of patients who are willing to talk to newcomers and make an introduction.

9. FEAR OF BEING JUDGED

Many people feel uncomfortable about spending money on themselves, especially elective treatments intended to improve their appearance. They worry that others will see them as superficial or self-indulgent. This often occurs among women who have spent much of their adult lives as caregivers, as they can struggle with taking care of themselves. Meet these concerns by reminding them that these days, being 30, 40, 50, or 60 is still young; they deserve a fresh appearance, greater confidence, and to give themselves a little bit of TLC. Emphasize that your practice strives for natural results, and they won't look overdone or drastically different. People may not even be able to identify what the patient had done, simply acknowledging that they look great.

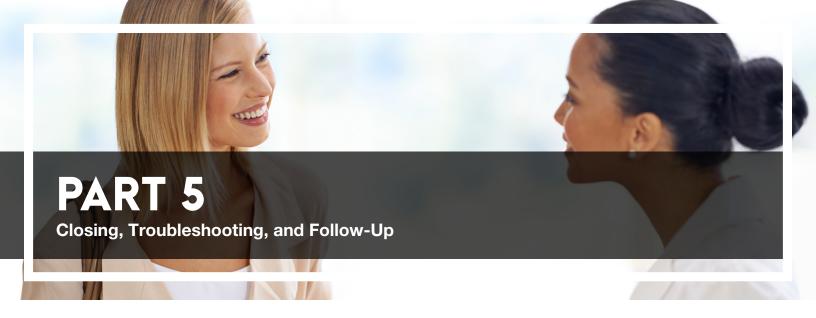
10. ANXIETY ABOUT MAKING A BAD DECISION

Patients can get overwhelmed with information, especially if you have given them lots of different treatment options. They may become paralyzed by the fear of making a bad choice. Address this fear by grouping procedures into clear treatment paths and stages. Explain how the treatments work synergistically, and how they can be spaced to optimize results and budget. Be sure to go over the treatment options and show how each proposed step addresses the issue that brought the patient in. Clarify the ideal first step to help address the highest-priority concern. You can also explain that many contemporary consumers approach aesthetic treatments as an ongoing series of interventions that keep them looking great, rather than a radical one-time treatment later in life.

SEEKING PATIENT ACCEPTANCE AGAIN AND PREPARING TO FOLLOW UP

After addressing any reservations, reattempt to get the patient's commitment. Posing careful questions and statements can help to nudge the patient forward. For example:

- "Did that explanation help you make a decision?"
- "How are you feeling now about the treatment plan?"
- "You sound more comfortable with treatment now. Did you have a date in mind?"
- "Let's check the schedule and see when you could have this done."



If at this point the patient is still unwilling to commit, outline your standard next steps. Call the prospective patient within a few days to see if they have further questions. If your practice deducts the consultation fee from treatment cost, remind the patient that the offer only applies within a specific timeframe (for example, two months). A handwritten note thanking them for coming in for the consultation is also a nice touch.

If you discover after the patient leaves the consultation that their hesitation was due to lack of rapport with the provider, or doubts about the treatment plan, invite them to return for another consultation at no charge. Every practice can have an off day, and this can be an opportunity for a do-over. Make sure to use your reflective and empathetic listening skills, slow down, and connect on a personal level.

TRACKING YOUR PERFORMANCE FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS

Tracking your rates of patient acceptance by procedure can help identify areas of improvement for the aesthetic consult. Look at the number of consultations compared to procedures. You will start to spot patterns, like lower conversion rates for certain treatments. Once trends begin to emerge, analyze what could account for them. You can look at a few different things:

- Do fewer patients convert on days when you have fewer staff on hand, or at times of the day that tend to be rushed or have longer wait times?
- For procedures that do not convert as strongly as others, are you or your care coordinator as skilled at explaining them?
- Do you have a different consultation technique for certain treatments compared to others?
- How do your fees compare to your market for procedures with lower conversion?
- Does your practice enjoy a strong reputation in a particular niche, and face resistance with other services?
- Do certain staff members perform better at securing patient acceptance? What do they do that stands out?

As you move through this process, note which practices are already in use, and where you can fine-tune your consultations. Each element plays an important role in the patient's comfort level, which ultimately dictates whether or not a patient decides to use your services.

At Venus Concept, we share your dedication to continuous improvement and excellence in patient care. We offer practice enhancement services to our practitioner partners and stand ready to assist your clinic.