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2023 Women in Dermatology

What patients want to talk about in 2023

From common skin conditions to more intimate problems that are rarely discussed, female dermatologists and patients have more Tx options than ever before

by **Diane Bracuk**,
Correspondent,
Women in Dermatology

The past decade has seen a welcome increase in the number of female dermatologists. But the growing popularity of cosmetic procedures and online skincare experts has caused some confusion and some misconceptions about what dermatologists actually do. To gain some insight into these issues, **Women in Dermatology** talked to some female dermatologists about challenges in this ever-evolving profession.

More than a weekend course in skincare

“One of the things that has come up for me over the years is that people are surprised that we go to medical school,” said Dr. Renita Ahluwalia, a lead dermatologist at the Canadian Dermatology and Plastic Surgery Centre in Toronto. “In reality, dermatology is one of the hardest residencies to get into, requiring at least eight years of training, often consisting of medical school, internships, and residencies in order to work in our field.”

Her practice partner at the Canadian Dermatology and Plastic Surgery Centre, dermatologist Dr. Lisa Kellett, also shares Dr. Ahluwalia’s frustration that dermatology is perceived as a specialty anyone can master. “People are taking a weekend correspondent course in skincare and calling themselves dermatologists. You would never see that happen with neurologists. By hijacking our professional title, these people are minimizing our specialty, which is incredibly complex.”

Another misconception is that female dermatologists lead a glamorous life and have flawless skin. “People think that we have an endless income and prioritize our own cosmetic treatments to ensure we always look our best,” said Dr. Rosilene Lanzini, a dermatologist at Belmar Dermatology + Cosmetic in Burlington, Ont. “Realistically we age just like the rest of the public, and although we may understand how to prevent signs of aging, aging in general is inevitable to us all.”

Like the other dermatologists, she is annoyed by the perception that dermatology is an easy specialty. “The reality is that we see many patients every day with a wide range of diseases varying in severity, each requiring a high level of attention and care.”

Overlapping services for skincare

Part of the perception issue lies in the increasingly blurred boundaries between cosmetic procedures and other beauty products and services. While all dermatologists are trained first and foremost as

medical dermatologists, some are pursuing additional training in cosmetic dermatology, and how they choose to integrate these specialties into their practice is up to the individual. As Dr. Katie Belezny, a Vancouver dermatologist and aesthetic specialist, explained, “While many dermatologists may offer cosmetic treatments in addition to seeing medical patients, others may build their practice solely around cosmetic patients.”

Cosmetic dermatologists perform a wide range of procedures which include botulinum injections, injectable fillers, and lasers. However, nurses, aestheticians, and other personnel at beauty salons and wellness spas also provide some of those treatments. That’s where boundaries can get blurry.

“Having this space where there are all different types of professionals with varying degrees of credentials has led to a misconception of cosmetic dermatology,” said Dr. Ahluwalia. “I’ve even had patients tell me they’re surprised that I’m giving them injectables. They thought just nurses gave them.”

The rise in untrained providers doing injections has led to more ‘botched’ results which then need to be corrected by a dermatologist, she added. “People will go to places and they don’t know what has been injected into their face. One of my patients developed a facial granuloma reaction to an unknown filler substance which caused her nasal bridge to collapse, and we’re trying to bring down the inflammation.”

Combating misinformation from TikTok

The skincare industry has always been rife with unproven claims about magical new serums, but the problem has been amplified with the proliferation of quack remedies on social media platforms such as TikTok, where random advice from ‘skinfluencers’ replaces that of a dermatologist.

Not only are some of these remedies ineffective, but some, such as DIY mole removal with salicylic acid or using sunscreen only in select areas to “naturally” contour the face, can be downright dangerous.

While social media is at the heart of medical misinformation, it can also be a way to combat it, some clinicians agree.

“For dermatologists, having a strong online presence can help connect with potential patients, and educate the public about skincare,” said Dr. Belezny. “With all the misinformation online, I believe it’s important for those who are experts to share their knowledge and debunk myths about skincare.”

Covid-related skin problems

With mask wearing and the stress of isolation, it’s not surprising that dermatologists are seeing more skin problems now that restrictions are lifted, and patients are returning to dermatology offices for in-person visits. “There has been an uptick in perioral dermatitis [a subtype of rosacea] and acne around the mouth area [maskne] during the pandemic due to mask wearing,” said Dr. Wei Jing Loo, a dermatologist at DermEffects in London Ont. “We’re also seeing more temporary hair loss which is due to a combination of many factors including stress.”

More concerning is that some people delayed checking moles, nodules, and rashes during lockdown. “The result is that I’m seeing skin cancers that are presenting in more advanced stages due to access issues to timely healthcare,” Dr. Woo said.

Dr. Lanzini has experienced similar cases in her practice. “Once patients began addressing their dermatological issues again, I found the number of skin cancer lesions increased in quantity and size,” she said, adding that the lack of examination

and lack of early intervention during the pandemic permitted the growth of lesions.

Balancing work, family and passion

Dermatology has traditionally been viewed as a speciality with a good work/life blend, offering a 9 to 5 workday with few emergencies. But according to Dr. Lanzini, this has changed over the past two to three years, largely due to the pandemic.

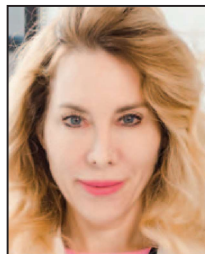
“We’ve seen a significant increase in the volume of patients who would like to be seen and become upset when we are unable to accommodate them on a more urgent basis,” she said. “Patients expect us to work weekends and evenings to accommodate their work schedules and expect shorter wait times, but with the lack of hours in a day this is nearly impossible. We hope in the next two to three years we can make a comeback to how things were before the pandemic, and finally catch up allowing us to take more breaks, vacations, and spend time with family.”

For Dr. Loo, her passion for her profession helps to balance the demands and challenges. “I’m the worst person to talk to about work/life balance,” she admitted. “I love all aspects of dermatology, be it medical, research, or cosmetic dermatology.” She was quick to say that she does take time for her family, whether it’s watching her children play sports or travelling with her family.

However dermatologists choose to spend their downtime, there is one pet peeve—people asking them to look at their skin problems outside of office hours. “People are always very quick to say can I show you this, or can I show you that as if it’s a one-minute thing I can diagnose on the spot or fit into my schedule,” Dr. Ahluwalia said. “They would never do that with a cardiologist.”



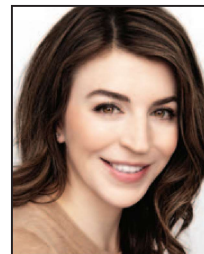
Dr. Renita Ahluwalia
Toronto



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Toronto



Dr. Rosilene Lanzini
Burlington, Ont.



Dr. Katie Belezny
Vancouver



Dr. Wei Jing Loo
London, Ont.