Social Media A Major Influence On Elective Surgery

Social media is leading consumers to have a more self-critical eye, according to a new survey by the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery (AAFPRS). The annual poll of 752 of the organization's board-certified facial plastic surgeons found that there was a 31% increase in requests for surgery as a result of social media photo sharing.

The study shows that a growing number of procedures are cosmetic versus reconstructive in nature, accounting for 73% of all procedures in 2012, up from 62% in 2011. Of the procedures requested as a result of social media influence, rhinoplasty, BOTOX®, and facelifts topped the list.

While social media continues to play an increasingly large role in how consumers view themselves, its influence as a trusted informational resource for plastic surgery is diminishing. Last year just 7% of prospective patients used social media to research doctors and procedures, down from 35% in 2011. Instead, 57% got their information about plastic surgery online, with 33% relying on referrals.

"Patients are becoming increasingly more sophisticated in their knowledge of plastic surgery due to the obvious increases in online research and validations," said Ed Williams , MD, Group Vice President for Public and Regulatory Affairs for the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery. "Our members are seeing a much more educated consumer base than ever before, thanks to the increased availability of information."

No matter how consumers select their facial plastic surgeon, the AAFPRS warns to be wary of discount deals online offering reduced rates on surgery and injectables. Three quarters of AAFPRS members caution consumers to stay away from these deals, citing them as potentially unethical and inappropriate without prior evaluation and consultation from a licensed healthcare professional.

"While it may be tempting to get a discount on aesthetic procedures, we encourage patients to exercise caution with blindly purchasing online deals." said Robert M. Kellman , MD, President of the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery. "To ensure the best results, you want to select a board-certified surgeon who specializes in plastic surgery of the face, head and neck."

A key question to ask your potential facial plastic surgeon is how many times he or she performs a given procedure. "Think of finding the right surgeon as a job interview," said Dr. Kellman, "and come prepared with a list of questions that will help you determine his/her qualifications, training and experience in performing those specific procedures."

Non-surgical treatments made up two-thirds of all cosmetic procedures requested in 2012. While they are still popular for their ability to delay signs of aging with minimally invasive measures, the number of non-surgical procedures performed was down last year. The most common cosmetic non-surgical procedures remain BOTOX® and hyaluronic acid fillers, with the top three areas of the face most treated by injectables being the forehead (42%), cheeks (35%) and the lips (18%).

Conversely, requests for surgical procedures are on the rise, with rhinoplasty, blepharoplasty and facelifts being the most requested in 2012. Among all procedures, the largest increase was among requests for facelifts and blepharoplasty (eyelid surgery), while lip augmentation and calcium hydroxyapatite injections showed the greatest declines.

The number of men undergoing facial plastic surgery continues to rise, and the AAFPRS survey suggests there's no sign of slowing down. With more patients citing the need to remain competitive in the workforce as a determining factor in the decision to have surgery, men are turning to non-invasive procedures to retain their professional edge.

"More and more men opt to have cosmetic procedures," said Dr. Kellman. "Men often turn to aesthetic treatments to remain competitive in the work force, keep up with their partners or if they are single, stay in the dating game."

Notably, the number of men having BOTOX® was up 27% from 2011, with hyaluronic acid fillers and microdermabrasion also among the most popular maintenance treatments.

The AAFPRS study also shows that men are more likely to request plastic surgery as a result of their significant other also undergoing cosmetic surgery, with 20% of all male patients being influenced by a partner's decision. Rhinoplasty remains the most requested surgical procedure overall among men.

Women continue to be the most likely candidates for facial plastic surgery, accounting for 80% of all surgical as well as non-surgical procedures last year. Of this group, two-thirds of women having procedures are mothers, primarily in their 40's and 50's. AAFPRS members have seen an uptick in female family procedures as a bonding experience, with a 16% increase in mother-daughter procedures and a 12% increase in sister-sister procedures.

In 2012 the most common cosmetic surgical procedure for women was facelifts, followed by blepharoplasty, and rhinoplasty. The most common non-surgical cosmetic procedures among women were BOTOX®, hyaluronic acid injections and microdermabrasion, respectively.

The face of plastic surgery is getting younger thanks to the availability of more minimally invasive procedures and growing social acceptance. In 2012, 28% of AAFPRS members saw an increase in cosmetic surgery and facial injectables in those under the age of 25. For children and teens, the survey found that they are more likely to have plastic surgery as a result of being bullied (76%) versus a way to

prevent bullying (24%).

For both female and male patients under the age of 35, the most common procedure performed was rhinoplasty (53% females; 70% males), followed by BOTOX® (30% women; 13% men). For all procedures, except rhinoplasty, the majority were performed on patients between the ages of 35 and 60.

Ten percent of AAFPRS surgeons have seen an increase among Hispanic, Asian American and African American patients in their practice in 2012, with the largest increase of 40% among Caucasian patients.

When compared to the other facial cosmetic procedures offered, the 2012 survey revealed that African Americans and Hispanics were most predisposed to have received rhinoplasty (80% and 65% respectively). Asian Americans were most likely to have blepharoplasty (44%) or rhinoplasty (41%), while Caucasians were more likely to have facelifts (40%) or rhinoplasty (39%).

Plastic surgery continues to advance due to new technology and improved techniques, attracting more consumers than ever before.

The top trend AAFPRS members have identified is that consumers are more educated about plastic surgery. A more educated consumer base is leading to the further decline in requests for celebrity procedures (down to only 7%), with 53% of patients instead asking for a procedure by area of concern and 28% asking for it by name.

When considering surgery, most patients were primarily concerned with the results (40%), followed by cost (33%) and recovery time (21%), with pain/invasiveness and social perception playing a very small role in their decision.

Milestone events were also a driving factor, and aside from weddings, which hold the number one spot, high school reunions topped the charts as the event most likely to be an impetus for surgery.

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