



RISKY BUSINESS

AAMSSA President **DR DEBBIE NORVAL** uncovers the challenges, risks and legalities involved in the practice of aesthetic medicine in salons and spas.

We've all experienced a typical doctor's rooms, with the stern receptionist, plastic chairs and long wait while reading outdated magazines. It's clinical and intimidating, with the anxiety-inducing waft of medical disinfectant in the air. Compare this to a spa. Now that's a different story altogether! The word alone sounds soothing and relaxing. The spa evokes images of candles, beautiful music, warmth and pampering, friendly helpful staff and luxurious treatments. So, it's not surprising that the concept of combining beauty treatments with medical aesthetic procedures is so tempting. Many business and spa owners are lured by the demand and profitability of medical treatments, yet are not fully informed about the medical, legal and regulatory risks involved. And while this practice is not illegal, AAMSSA has many concerns about doctors practising

medicine in a non-clinical setting such as a spa or salon.

Who/what is AAMSSA?

AAMSSA (Aesthetic and Anti-Aging Society of South Africa) is a SAMA (South African Medical Association) affiliated scientific society that is mandated to enhance education, regulation and the safe and legitimate practice of aesthetic and anti-ageing medicine in South Africa. And because aesthetic medicine is a medical discipline, it is for the safety of our patients that AAMSSA strongly encourages our doctors to work in a clinical setting, rather than in salons or spas.

Practising medicine in non-clinical premises

Doctors in South Africa are regulated by the rules and ethical guidelines set by the Health Professions Act and the HPCSA (Health Professions Council

of South Africa). The HPCSA Ethical Guidelines clearly state that unless it is an emergency, a medical act must be performed under proper conditions and appropriate surroundings. When aesthetic medical procedures are performed in a salon or spa, it is done so on premises that are non-clinical, unregulated and lacking an aseptic environment.

Lack of medical supervision

Most medical aesthetic treatments require supervision by a medical doctor who should be physically present on the premises. Unfortunately, many doctors working in salons and spas are only there for a few hours a week, if that. Some medi-spas have a doctor who supports their treatments and writes scripts, but doesn't even visit the premises. The non-medical staff are therefore left unsupervised most of the time. Suffice to say, a doctor's 'support' or a once-a-week visit is not acceptable or safe practice.

Initial assessment by the doctor

Many patients aren't aware that when they see a therapist for any medical aesthetic treatment, they must first have had a doctor's consultation. Sadly, patients often don't even know who the prescribing doctor is, which is of particular concern should a complication occur. Additionally, supervising doctors should evaluate each patient before treatment, obtain written informed consent for every procedure, prescribe treatments and remain actively involved in the course of treatment. A doctor needs to be readily available to deal with adverse events, even if the actual procedure is delegated to a therapist or nurse.

