



Influence of television on demand for cosmetic surgery

Darryl J Hodgkinson

TO THE EDITOR: Petrie and colleagues alert us to some negative effects of “appearance medicine” television programs.¹ I agree that participants in television programs on cosmetic surgery should not be induced to have surgery by the offer of a significant reduction or waiving of the fee for the operation on the condition that they expose themselves before, during and after the procedures. Removing the cost component is a significant enticement to undergo cosmetic surgery. However, many procedures need to be repeated and implanted products replaced. If potential patients cannot afford future expenditure, they may be unsuitable for cosmetic surgery.

The intense competition between providers of cosmetic surgery procedures leads them to seek media exposure — surgeons and non-surgeons jostle for supremacy and market share. Australian and New Zealand cosmetic surgery websites show a wide array of highly posed, seductive images that promise more than is likely to be possible. In New South Wales, a medical practice amendment on advertising regulation was introduced on 1 July 2008, to provide stricter regulation of “before and after” photographs targeted at patients considering cosmetic surgery.²

However, patients have the right to be

informed. A survey, cited by Petrie et al, of first-time patients seeking plastic surgery revealed what I consider a positive side to appearance medicine television programs: patients who regularly viewed such programs believed themselves to be more knowledgeable about plastic surgery, and its issues and risks, than “low-intensity” viewers of such programs.³

The growth of cosmetic surgery has been phenomenal and will continue during the next decade. At present, it is unclear whether patients are enticed or merely educated by appearance medicine television programs. However, it is clear that they are more likely to be knowledgeable because of the information provided to them, and that the knowledge they gain may improve their ability to assess a surgeon’s capability and credibility.

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- 1 Petrie KJ, Faasse KE, Fuhrmann SA. Influence of television on demand for cosmetic surgery [editorial]. *Med J Aust* 2008; 189: 244-245.
- 2 NSW Health. New regulations provide truth in advertising for medical services [press release]. Sydney: NSW Health, 1 Jul 2008. http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/news/2008/20080701_00.html (accessed Dec 2008).
- 3 Crockett RJ, Pruzinsky T, Persing JA. The influence of plastic surgery “reality TV” on cosmetic surgery patient expectations and decision making. *Plast Reconstr Surg* 2007; 120: 316-324. □