

HAMILTON
FRASER

COSMETIC
INSURANCE

A photograph of two women looking at a tablet. The woman on the right is wearing a white lab coat and glasses, while the woman on the left is wearing a blue denim shirt. They are both smiling and looking at the tablet. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

The importance of patient selection

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The importance of patient selection

Managing patient expectations and ensuring you are selecting the 'right' patients is key to running a successful aesthetic practice. Whilst no one wants to turn business away and reject a patient who does not listen to your guidance and advice, understanding when to say 'no' to unsuitable patients could prevent a claim against you in the future.

What factors do you need to consider when selecting patients and how can you assess a patient's suitability for treatment?

1. Understand and manage the patient's expectations

The initial consultation is crucial to understanding and managing the patient's expectations. It is important to allow enough time to assess the patient's suitability for treatment. The consultation should involve a psychological assessment that focuses on the patient's motivations and expectations of the treatment.

Building a rapport with the patient during the consultation is key to understanding their expectations. Select patients you are more likely to be able to build a long-term relationship with and they are in turn more likely to be open and honest about what they are hoping to achieve from the treatment and their motivation in electing to have it.

Developing an understanding of your patient's motivations will allow you to identify any issues relating to how they perceive their physical appearance and body image. If they appear to be particularly anxious about a defect that is not noticeable or they dwell for longer than usual periods of time over their appearance then this may be an indication of Body Dysmorphism Disorder (BDD).

When discussing their expectations it is important to be honest with your patient. If you are unable to achieve the results that they are hoping for you need to explain what can be achieved and make sure that they understand this information. If they do not appear to be listening or digesting the information this could be a sign that they are the wrong patient. In this instance you may decide to say 'no'.

2. Check your patient's medical history

This may seem to be an obvious part of the consultation process, but it is very important to ensure you take an honest medical history from your patient. It should include any medical conditions they have which may have contraindications with the treatment they are requesting, as well as any aesthetic treatments they have previously undertaken.

This will allow you to identify a potential 'red flag' patient, for example someone who is perhaps having too many treatments or suffering from any self-image concerns. Also, during these conversations the patient may suggest that they have been dissatisfied with previous treatments or other practitioners. This could be a sign that they might not be satisfied with any treatment they receive, which may indicate a potentially litigious patient. In this instance you may wish to avoid carrying out the procedure.

3. Educate the patient about the treatment

Explain to the patient how the treatment works, including any side-effects, what the recovery entails, how many sessions they will need and how it can assist them in achieving their realistic aesthetic goal. An educated patient will have a much better understanding of what is involved, as well as more realistic expectations of the outcomes, enabling them to make an informed decision as to whether the procedure is right for them.

4. Manage aftercare effectively

We would always recommend that, as well as discussing the necessary aftercare face-to-face with a patient, they are also either given a physical copy of the information to take away or are emailed a copy for their reference.

It is likely post-treatment that the patient will not take in all of the advice provided as they are excited about the outcome. By supplying a copy of the recommended aftercare and FAQs, they can refer to it once they have left the clinic. This also gives the patient a lasting feeling of support from you, which is beneficial to the longer term patient practitioner relationship.

5. Document everything

It is important to document all of the conversations about your patient's expectations and your advice as to what is achievable. We also advise that the patient signs or initials the consent form to confirm that they are in agreement with the conversations and advice they have received.

We recommend that the patient also signs or initials the aftercare information to confirm that it has been received and understood.

This is especially important in a claim scenario. At Hamilton Fraser Cosmetic Insurance we often see allegations that the patient was not aware of what they could expect during the treatment, what the realistic outcome would be or what the aftercare would involve. Ensuring that conversations about expectations and recommended aftercare are documented and signed within your consent form means that you have evidence that your patient made an informed decision. This evidence makes any subsequent allegations against you more easily defensible.

6. Don't be afraid to say no

If you feel at any point during the consultation process that the patient is perhaps not suitable for the treatment or you are unable to manage their expectations, then you may need to decline their treatment. Taking into account the amount of stress, time and potentially money that treating the wrong patient could incur, it is not worth taking the risk with a patient you do not think is suitable for a treatment.

The best way to say no to a patient is to be transparent and to explain that, having carried out a thorough assessment, you feel that they are unlikely to be happy with the outcome of the treatment. We often receive calls from practitioners who have felt sorry for a patient or been pressured into performing the treatment despite having trepidations. In our experience, these scenarios are the ones that are more likely to attract complaints or claims. Trust your gut instinct as more often than not it is likely to be correct.

Careful patient selection maximises the chances of your patient getting the very best results from your treatments. It is important to act in the patient's best interests by trying to understand their motivation and educating them about the realistic aesthetic outcome and what the treatment entails.



"We find that the most common reason practitioners end up going against their gut feelings and treating a patient who ultimately isn't suitable for treatment is because they are inexperienced and struggle to say no. This could be because they are trying to please their patient, or because of financial strain when starting out. Initially it may also be harder to identify red flags and develop an intuition for when a patient is approaching treatment from an unhealthy perspective. Awareness of patient psychological drivers for treatment, robust documentation and practising within your limits are essential when starting out in aesthetics."

Tristan Mehta (pictured above) from Harley Academy.

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