

## WORKING TOGETHER

# Creating an Integrated Team of Medical Doctors and Para-medical Therapists

BY ADA POLLA TRAY



**Ada S. Polla Tray, MBA,** is the eldest daughter of Luigi and Barbara Polla, owners of the two medical spas Forever Laser Institut in Geneva, Switzerland. She has worked with her parents in opening, running, and improving spa operations for a number of years. She also manages the development and distribution of her family's Alchimie Forever skin care line in North America.

She graduated in the top 5% of her MBA class at Georgetown University, and received her Magna cum Laude BA at Harvard University in art history. She has professional experience in consulting and product management of medical devices.

Ada is on the editorial board of PCI Magazine, a contributor to numerous trade magazines, and a frequent speaker at Georgetown University and industry tradeshows.

For more information on Forever Laser Institut or Alchimie Forever, please visit our website at [www.forever-beauty.com](http://www.forever-beauty.com), or call (703) 920-6800.

Spas, whether day spas or medical spas, share a number of key managerial issues, ranging from developing an appealing service menu, defining the right pricing strategy, and creating a front desk team that works. In addition to these common issues, medical spas present their owners and managers with some unique challenges that are not typically found in day spas. Key among them is the creation of an integrated team that is comprised of both medical doctors and para-medical therapists.

The team at our two medical spas in Switzerland, Forever Laser Institut, is comprised of 20 full-time positions, of which 5 are MDs. Ensuring that all work together constructively, advise patients in a complementary way (as opposed to suggesting opposite therapeutic approaches), and get along, has been an important factor in the success of our spas.

Why is this integration of medical and para-medical staff a challenge?

## Knowing versus doing

While MDs are typically considered as authorities in their field, holders of theoretical knowledge and expertise (gained in medical school), they do not necessarily master techniques or manual dexterity in treatments, something which aestheticians are usually reputed for (have you ever had an MD perform extractions?). This dichotomy is visible not only in medical

spas, but also in a hospital setting: the doctors have the knowledge and are in charge of diagnosing diseases and prescribing the right medicine. But when it comes to actually performing a task using their hands, nurses may be more competent.<sup>1</sup> This dichotomy between knowing and doing is an important source of stress between the medical and para-medical staff, as the medical doctors believe they know more, while the aestheticians think they do things better.

The way to address this source of potential tension is to actively and explicitly value the doctors' ability to perform services while also valuing the specific knowledge of the para-medical therapists. For example, at Forever Laser Institut, we decided to have mesotherapy treatments exclusively performed by our medical doctors. While not a legal requirement, this decision enabled the medical staff to show (prove) its technical abilities by performing a manually challenging treatment. Similarly, our medical team values our skin care therapists as experts in skin health and listens to their product explanations and advice.

## Recommendations of products and services

Another potential source of disagreement has to do with the recommendation of products and services. In my numerous medical spa visits, a common complaint from the aesthetician is that while the doctors on staff do send patients their way (for example

<sup>1</sup> The one notable exception to this general view is surgery.

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for a light peel to complement rejuvenating injections performed by the doctor), they make their job harder by minimizing the potential benefit of “aesthetician” treatments or skin care products. Similarly, doctors sometimes feel frustrated by their aesthetician’s perceived lack of understanding of the more complex medical treatments performed on the patient.

The psychology of patients is such that they will first and foremost listen to the doctor (after all, (s)he is the holder of medical knowledge), then to the para-medical therapists. As such, for an aesthetician’s recommendations to be effective, they need to be supported by the doctor, and in line with his/her own therapeutic suggestions.

The solution to this potential issue is education of the team and collaboration. Recommendations from any member of the team must be aligned with those of others, in particular when a single patient is being seen by both the doctor and the aesthetician. Both the medical and the para-medical staff need to be aware of and in agreement with the treatments performed and products recommended by the other. This requires joint education and much communication. For example, at Forever Laser Institut, we use weekly meetings to discuss new treatments, new services, and share product knowledge. This ensures that everyone is on the same page. Furthermore, we ensure that specific patients’ therapeutic histories are discussed jointly by the doctor and the aesthetician when they are both seeing the same client.

We have also found that having the staff benefit from various treatments is worth a thousand words. A doctor who has never had a facial with extractions is hard-pressed to talk about the benefits of such deep-



cleansing with her patients. Similarly, an aesthetician who has never experienced Botox may not be able to effectively recommend the treatment to her skin care clients.

The various strategies suggested in this article have worked at Forever Laser Institut and enabled us to create an integrated team comprised of both medical and para-medical members. While the effectiveness of the two solutions presented here will differ depending on the size of the team and the services performed, actively and explicitly valuing the doctor’s manual technique and the aesthetician’s skin care expertise, and enhancing communication to ensure each patient receives an integrated treatment regimen are the keys to building a strong and collaborative team of medical doctors and para-medical therapists. ◆