

# BEAUTY



More and more people are turning to cosmetic procedures to keep it at bay. And a local practitioner has been at the forefront of the shift 'having work done'. **Di Digard** speaks to Dr John Curran

## Holding back the

**A**T 50, my mother, peachy-skinned and lovely to the end of her days, nevertheless looked like the granny she was. Now of roughly the same vintage, I hope I don't. And I'm not the only one. 'I went to a 50th birthday bash the other night,' a colleague told me, 'and it was extraordinary, from the Botoxed brows to the Beckham breasts. No one looked a day over 40.' Hot topic of the night was the 'work' the female – and some of the male – guests had had done. No one held back. And they weren't just talking cosmetic surgery. The facelift may be Britain's third-most-popular procedure – behind breast augmentation and eyelid surgery – but non-surgical treatments designed to hold back the years are becoming equally popular.

Some see them as a kind of halfway house between routine beauty care and the scalpel. TV programmes such as *Nip/Tuck* and *Ten Years Younger* have brought cosmetic surgery to the fore and Sunday Times journalist Kate Spicer is the latest to thirst for a more youthful look. In Super Botox Me (Channel 4, Sunday, 10pm) she takes herself off to New York on a treatment odyssey with the aim of improving her wrinkly brow, sagging mouth and dark under-eye areas without actually resorting to surgery. The results? Not remotely like Joan Rivers, more a subtle improvement.

And that's what many women are aiming for, said the Aesthetic Skin Clinic's Dr John Curran. The former L'Aumone and St Sampson's GP has built up a hugely successful practice that sees 3-4,000 people every year. It offers anything from non-surgical treatments and minor surgery to breast augmentation and full facelifts, though the latter are not currently performed in Guernsey because of operating-theatre restrictions. But John hopes that will change in time. 'We send away £250,000 of business every year – that's £57,000 worth of fees which would go directly to the hospital,' he said. John also runs a big clinic in Jersey and two in Belfast, travelling regularly between them.

**E**ight years on, he has never been busier. 'After a few months it was obvious people wanted it. I've always practised dermatology and have practised cosmetic procedures since 1990 and I wanted to introduce those and laser treatments to the island,' he explained. John is president of the British Association of Cosmetic Doctors, which represents 400 cosmetic and plastic surgeons, dermatologists and cosmetic doctors in the UK and Ireland, including big names such as Professor Nic Lowe, who works out of Chelsea and Westminster Hospital and has been voted America's best dermatologist.

'I have taken this from being very much on the fringe to being a recognised part of medicine,' John said. He presides over a strong academic group with links to the University of Leicester and has taken a lead role in the UK and on the academic side. He looks upon the South Esplanade clinic as a medical practice rather than a business and he and his staff, which includes three surgeons, two cosmetic doctors and five nurses, are bound by medical codes of conduct. Major treatments make up about a fifth of his work. Non-surgical procedures include skin resurfacing and rejuvenation, the elimination of red 'spider' veins, laser hair removal, pigmentation treatment and Botox. The latter is the most popular, making up around 30% of the clinic's work. John is excited about the successful results he's had with injectable breast enhancement, an alternative to implants which can be performed in Guernsey and lasts for around two years.

**W**hile some of these treatments are carried out purely for their feel-good effects, others help people who may have struggled for years. It's a case of horses for courses, John tells me. 'For the woman with red veins on her legs who wears long skirts to the beach, the "miracle" treatment would be sclerotherapy. For someone with acne scarring, the laser treatment, Fraxel, can produce fantastic results. For the woman who

frowns a lot, it's Botox.' Why the explosion of interest in cosmetic surgery? 'It's because doctors are doing it better all the time,' said John. 'We now have a whole new breed of cosmetic surgeons who do only that. They're better trained and techniques are improving all the time.' He added that just by getting together with colleagues worldwide, collective knowledge is improving and practitioners are getting better results. 'In cosmetic dermatology, the things that are driving the market most are new procedures being available and technology being more and more clever. 'That's attracting a whole new generation of people who don't want to have surgical procedures but prefer to have minor interventions which make a significant difference.' And that difference is what brings him the most satisfaction. 'I am very proud of what we've achieved,' he said, talking of his work with the BACD as well as that with his patients. 'There is probably more satisfaction out of this than I've done. It's a very practical discipline. And you really do get results.'

The Aesthetic Skin Clinic's Dr John Curran: 'There is probably more satisfaction out of this than anything else I've done.' (Picture by John O'Neill, 0166311)

### TURNING THE CLOCK BACK

**S**MOKING, drinking, sun damage – while an entire generation of people claim they don't feel as old as they are, their skin often gives the game away. And that's before you factor in the wrinkles and sagging that shout 'middle-aged'. Women who hit 50 are also faced with plummeting oestrogen levels. That's when collagen and elastin begin to noticeably degenerate. But there is no need to resort immediately to the scalpel. Botox and facial fillers can help keep worsening skin tone and texture at bay. Then there are laser treatments such as Thermage, which tightens and plumps skin. It's been around for a few years and, say doctors, has been gradually refined to give fantastic results. 'Ninety-five per cent of people having Thermage reach their expectations with no side effects,' said John Curran. And Yale studies have found that the results can last up to five years, depending on age, skin condition and lifestyle. 'This is like setting the clock back, not stopping it.' The best candidates are those with mild to moderate skin laxity and no excessive sun damage: people in the 35-60 age group who don't want, or expect, a facelift. Some report excellent results after one treatment, but John usually recommends a follow-up session six months later for maximum effect. 'The effects are natural,' he explained. 'People may say you look rested. The changes are gradual, but full results

A laser treatment that tightens and plumps the skin offers a non-surgical way to combat ageing. **Di Digard** investigates Thermage

should be seen within six months.' But, he warned: 'Don't expect the dramatic results of surgery. These are subtle and natural-looking.' Thermage uses radio-frequency technology to tighten and lift skin, smooth out wrinkles and improve facial contours. A treatment tip delivers a controlled amount of energy to the area being treated. This heats amounts of collagen in the deeper layers of the skin and its underlying tissue. Not unnaturally, the skin resists – and that results in tightening. 'It's acting as if it's burning the skin, tricking it into thinking it has been burned. But there's no danger. The skin thinks it has to heal and makes collagen,' John explained. The technology has been around for six or seven years in this form. 'It's been shown that if you heat the skin to a level of 59-60C, it promotes tightening of collagen fibres and stimulation of new fibroblast – the precursors to forming collagen in skin. That's what gives the tightening effect.' There is nothing new about the technology – radio frequencies have been around for nearly a century – and previously this procedure was used in surgery for things such as cauterising blood vessels. 'It's one of a number of radio-frequency

devices but it's the only one we've found that has reputable results,' John said. 'And they're refining the technology all the time, so we expect it to get better and better.' Many of his patients decide on Thermage rather than plastic surgery. 'Although we have surgeons within the practice, many, many patients don't want it. There's the stigma and the downtime. Some feel that the anatomy is slightly distorted by surgery. But this tightens the skin where it is. The side-effects are minimal but patient selection is important. If the skin is too lax, it won't work. And repairing solar damage is far too difficult,' said John. 'You're pushing against the wind. You might benefit, but the treatment might not live up to expectations.'

I offer myself up for treatment, but don't admit to a penchant for sunbathing or a lifestyle that includes 10-hour stretches spent squinting at a computer screen and a fondness for white wine. Still, it transpires that I am the perfect candidate: not too much sun damage but a measure of skin laxity. 'That would be the jowls,' I joke. But Thermage is not just for faces: it's effective on hands and bingo wings, saggy necks, stomachs and even knees.



Feeling the heat: the tip delivers a message

Reassuringly, only medically-qualified doctors can perform the treatment, which begins with a liberal application of anaesthetic gel. An hour later my face is numb and John and the magic machine are systematically working on my face, with special attention to problem areas. It's not the most relaxing half-hour I've ever spent, but is uncomfortable rather than painful. As each 'dose' of radio waves is delivered there is a sharp sensation, rather like rubber bands pinching the



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skin. The machine makes a high-pitched noise followed by the 'put-put' of the cooling device that helps to minimise discomfort. 'Feel the heat?' says John. I do. But that's good. 'If you don't, the process isn't working.' And the results are immediate. In the digital photographs taken before the procedure I look like an ageing convict – it's shocking. Afterwards, there is actually a discernible jawline. My face feels numb – that's the anaesthetic still at work – but apart

from a little redness, which is easily covered, there are no side effects and I go straight back to work and into a meeting.

No one notices anything amiss.

The burns, bruises and dents reported by some tabloid newspapers are rare, John told me. 'This is virtually without side effects apart from some redness.'

The outcome of the second treatment, six months later, is even more noticeable. 'That's when you see the real results,' said John.

Afterwards, there is definite general tightening, especially around the chin and neck. As a bonus, my skin feels incredibly soft, with lifting around the eye area – a welcome antidote to all those hours of peering.

'Don't people tell you how well you look?' John wants to know.

Well, no. Not usually.

But in the following two days, three do. And in the weeks that follow, the tightening effects not only last, but continue to improve.

Now that's what I call a result.

● For more information on Thermage, go to [www.askinclinic.co.uk](http://www.askinclinic.co.uk) or phone 736699.

**'Afterwards, there is actually a discernible jawline'**

#### BEFORE AND AFTER



'Thermage is not just for faces: it's effective on hands and bingo wings, saggy necks, stomachs and even knees,' says Dr Digard. (0595753/59/45/50)

