

A modern fountain of youth?

Women and men find rejuvenation in medical health spas

by Joan Tupponce

Like many women who have reached midlife, 46-year-old Karen Leonard is looking for ways to age gracefully. A stay-at-home mom and community volunteer in Richmond, Leonard has been visiting spas for 20 years. "I've gone to day spas, spa camps and medical spas," she says. "I've been to highly rated spas such as Canyon Ranch," including visits to both of its locations in Massachusetts and Arizona.

These days Leonard has found an elixir for youth closer to home at a nearby medical spa. "Medical spas have products you can't get over the counter that are more effective in maintaining your complexion," she explains. "They're also convenient. You can go get your treatment in an hour or so."

Leonard likes the fact that her skin looks

Medical spas offer many skin treatments. In this photo Erin Stratton, a nurse practitioner and skin therapist for Ageless Remedies in Henrico County, exfoliates the skin of spa Director Carol Maddock, through a procedure known as microdermabrasion.



better, but no one knows why unless she discloses her secret. "It's like taking the cushions off of your sofa and vacuuming them and having your husband say that nothing looks different," she explains. "You know what you did but [no one else does]." It's all about maintaining what you have, she adds. "And it costs less than surgery."

More people, especially baby boomers, are turning to medical spas. They want to keep a competitive edge in their professions by maintaining a youthful appearance. And in these private, upscale settings — a grand piano greets customers at one Richmond spa — women and men are getting services such as Botox injections and chemical peels, treatments not found at traditional day spas.

Typically run under the supervision of

physicians, medical spas represent the fastest-growing segment in the spa industry. Spa Finder — a prominent spa marketing, media and research firm based in New York — estimates that these spas make up about 10 percent of the country's spa industry. There are more than 1,250 medical spas today, up 50 percent from a year ago, and about 24 of them are located in Virginia. One of the reasons for their growth is the increasing number of male customers who use them.

"We have seen tremendous growth in the spa industry in general and medical spas in particular," says Spa Finder's President, Susie Ellis. She identifies two types of medical spas — wellness facilities, which offer services such as executive physicals, diagnostic testing and

nutrition counseling, and aesthetic/cosmetic spas, which focus on clinical services. Both areas are growing, although Ellis sees more aesthetic/cosmetic medical spas. "We're also seeing medical spas that [cater to both types of clients]," she says.

Many people are turning to medical spas as an alternative to plastic surgery. "They are looking for products that will make a difference without going to a plastic surgeon," says Carol Maddock, spa director and co-owner of Ageless Remedies in Henrico County. "Medical spas provide a more relaxed, less clinical atmosphere. They offer more of a personal touch."

Ageless Remedies combines clinical and traditional spa treatments, offering microdermabrasion (a procedure that exfoliates dead skin), Botox, Restylane (a product that fills in the lines of the face), chemical peels, acne treatments, anti-aging treatments, facials and laser hair removal. Procedures range from \$12 for lip waxing to \$2,340 for six laser hair-removal treatments for your legs. Research shows that the average medical spa client spends from \$1,000 to \$3,500 on treatments.

Ageless Remedies operates under the supervision of a medical director, Dr. Alan Burke, who is board certified by the American Board of Otolaryngology and by the American Academy of Facial and Plastic Reconstructive Surgery. Burke comes in weekly to check protocols. "There are certain things you can't do such as Botox and laser hair removal if you don't have a medical director," explains Maddock. "The medical director also has to oversee the equipment. He has to sign for and okay the lasers and most of our products."

Consumers who use medical spas want the expertise of the medical profession. "It's good for people to do their homework and ask questions [before getting treatments] in order to avoid problems," says Ellis.

Some medical spas are owned by physicians. "They are looking for ways to generate revenue," says Marti Morenings, founder and CEO of Universal Cos. Inc., an Abingdon-based supplier of spa industry products. Morenings notes that there are dozens of medical spas of various sizes in Virginia. The list includes Vitalia Medspa in Falls Church, the Medical Spa at NOVA in Ashburn, the Augusta Medical Center in Fishersville, the Rejuvenage Med Spa in Bristol, Oxygen Med Spa in Virginia Beach and Spa Medics in Williamsburg.

Dr. Charles Martin, a dentist who runs the Richmond Smile Center, founded Refreshpa in September. The 1,500-square-foot spa

The number of medical spas in Virginia is growing according to Marti Morenings, CEO of Universal Cos. Inc., an Abingdon-based supplier of spa industry products.



has a grand piano in the reception area and an Italian-themed Internet café featuring gourmet coffee and specialty teas. Like other medical spas, Refreshpa provides treatment rooms, a private consultation area and a wide range of services, including VelaSmooth, an FDA-approved procedure that's designed to diminish the appearance of cellulite. Martin oversees the spa but also has a physician/medical director who administers Botox and Restylane injections.

"There are two groups of people who come to our spa — people who want to look better and people who want to feel better," says Martin. He contends that enhancing one's

looks has positive benefits. "It can help change the quality of your life and the longevity."

Middle-age women aren't the only ones visiting medical spas. Spa Finder says men represent 30 percent of spa customers in the U.S. "Men are definitely using spa services," says Ellis. "One of the main reasons they go is because they want improvement in their skin and [to look] youthful. That can help them in the job arena."

Yet for men privacy is an issue. "They don't tell anyone [they've been to a spa]," notes Maddock. "On the other hand, most women come in and think it's a fun experience. They tell everybody."



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