



Lunch hour nip & tuck

Demand for non-invasive treatments is the fastest-growing segment in aesthetics, especially in more conservative markets such as Singapore's. **By Cheah Ui-Hoon**

JUST a decade ago, going for a "quickie" during lunch time meant only one or a couple of things. But now, a quickie could – and most likely would – refer to an aesthetic procedure at a clinic which requires no downtime.

Ducking into a clinic to tighten one's face or zap a few inches off the waistline are just what some people are doing in aesthetic clinics in the space of a lunch hour.

Non-invasive, machine-based treatments are as common as hairstyling or old-school facials these days, with technological advances in aesthetics having made cosmetic treatments much more compelling to men and women of all ages – especially when they see the effects.

A friend who was once suspicious of aesthetic treatments asked recently: "Why bother with a regular facial when a laser treatment gives you more benefit in half the time?"

K K Chew, the medical director and founder of NU-U Aesthetics & Wellness Clinic, said: "Market demand is increasing and technology advances have made it possible for customers to see results that were previously unavailable with non-invasive treatments."

With technology, results can now mimic the results of surgical procedures, but without the downtime and pain, he said.

"Certainly, men and women are finding fewer reasons to say 'no' to scientifically proven technology to help them look better and feel better," said Jeff Nardoci, vice-president of global marketing for Solta Medical, which owns premier brands such as Thermage, Fraxel and Liposonix in its medical aesthetics arsenal.

Technology meeting conservative needs

Koreans aren't shy about going under the scalpel, but Singaporeans tend to be a little more conservative, which points to a big market for technology-led aesthetics that do not involve surgery, said Mr Nardoci.

"In Asia, generally, the demand for non-invasive treatments is the fastest growing segment in the aesthetics market. More conservative countries tend to be more cautious when it comes to aesthetic treatments, choosing

non-invasive alternatives wherever possible," he says. But while the demand for non-invasive treatments in Asia is fastest growing, the region's market is also highly fragmented, with countries at different stages of the consumer and doctor life cycle, he said.

People in Korea, Japan, Hong Kong and Thailand are the most receptive to aesthetic treatments and have established large communities of aesthetic doctors and patients. China is a fast-growing market with strong potential, but with safety still a concern there, many Chinese seek treatments elsewhere in Asia, where there are more established practices.

Countries such as Singapore and Malaysia are slowly embracing aesthetic treatments, although the majority of people are still cautious about aesthetic treatments.

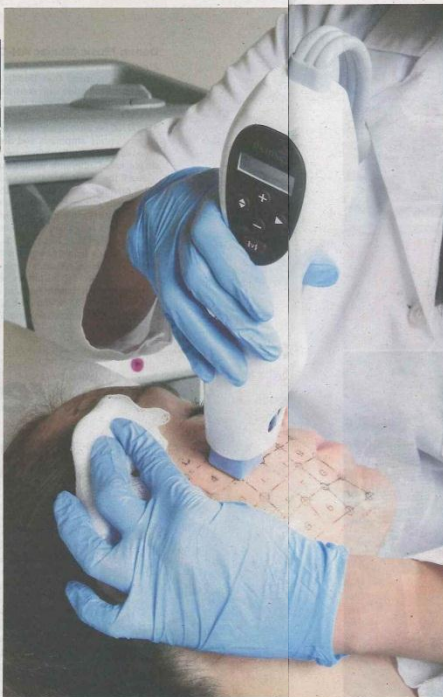
But a widening market base in all countries is something that can be bet on, with younger and older customers and an increasing number of men seeking treatments to enhance their features, or to look younger or slimmer, said Mr Nardoci.

The second quarter of Solta Medical's 2012 revenue from the Asia-Pacific grew 32 per cent year-on-year, driven primarily by the sale of non-invasive treatment devices. Its global revenue for that quarter was \$37.3 million, an increase of 29 per cent or \$8.5 million over the second quarter of last year.

Mr Nardoci said that the rising affluence in Singapore has bred "family practices" among aesthetic practitioners, who can offer every member of the family something: For example, a woman in her 40s or 50s might go for Solta's Thermage skin tightening treatment; her teenage daughter may go for Solta's Clear-Brilliant facial laser treatment. As the daughter grows older, she continues seeing the same doctor, but for other treatments, according to her changing needs, says Mr Nardoci.

Technological milestones

The technological changes in the last five years are what has changed the landscape, said NU-U Aesthetics & Wellness Clinic's Dr Chew. "Take the Co2 laser for example. It's a laser peel that couldn't be applied full strength on Asian skin, or it would burn. With fraxellation, we can



NO DOWNTIME AND PAIN

Far left: Coolsculpting, which is non-invasive, has filled market demand since 2009. The third generation of Thermage machines (left and below) has halved the degree of discomfort, with its more uniform heating profile. Such machines enable more effective collagen remodelling.



now do a full-face procedure, with the patient feeling only a mild redness," he said.

Fractional lasers break up a wavelength of light into multiple columns, so that light energy is not concentrated in a single beam, which could do harm. The third generation of Thermage machines has halved the degree of discomfort, with its more uniform heating profile. Such machines enable more effective collagen remodelling.

"Thermage is good for patients in their 20s to 30s who go for preventive maintenance to build collagen reserves. It is also very suitable for those in their 40s to 50s who show visible signs of ageing as this helps to improve their skin laxity," he says.

Unsurprisingly, ever since a couple of liposuction-caused deaths here, demand for the procedure has dropped. But coolsculpting, which is non-invasive, has filled market demand since 2009; now, Liposonix Custom Contouring is about to further revolutionise body sculpting.

Gerald Teo, chief executive officer of Dermacare Aesthetic and Laser Clinic, said his clinic has not had a single request for liposuction since it opened in May. "The market is generally wary of liposuction, especially in Singapore. The trend is definitely towards non-invasive body contouring procedures with no down time and proven results."

Liposonix, a ground-breaking technology utilising high-intensity focused ultrasound, promises to take an average inch off with one hour-long treatment. Patients see the result in 14 days, as the body needs that long on average to metabolise the fat and excrete it through the liver, full results are typically seen in two to three months.

Dennis Kwan, medical director at Dermacare, said: "The added advantage of Liposonix Custom Contouring is that the heat effect also stimulates the collagen fibres around the skin and tightens it, leaving patients with a slimmer and more contoured waistline."

"Patients achieve a one size reduction in dress or pants size, and are happy because there is no down time and they do not have to go under the knife," he added.

Mr Nardoci said that while non-invasive treatments cannot beat surgical procedures for effectiveness, Liposonix body contouring gives results that come close. "Achieving a natural beauty and youthful look is important to women in Asia. This is why skin tightening, slimming and facial lasers have been rising in demand," he said.

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