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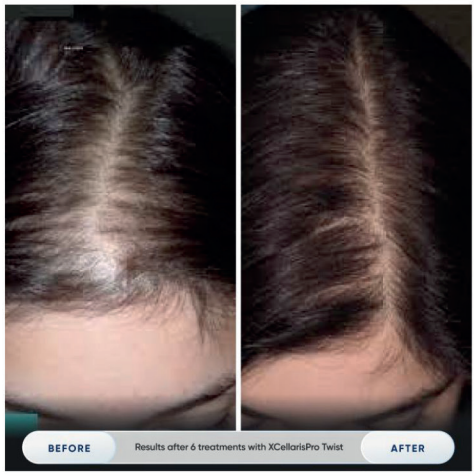



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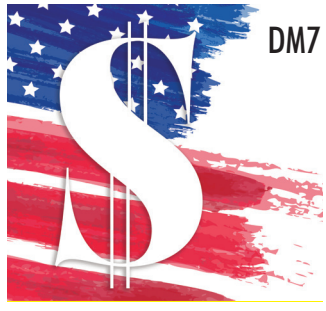

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KITTY LIN
Managing Editor
clin@allured.com

Dreams Are the Stuff Of This Issue

Skin Inc.'s Managing Editor Kitty Lin shares what's on her mind this month.

Happy New Year!

Now that we've all roused from our end-of-year festivities (and the much needed mini-hibernation to recuperate afterwards), we can get back to what's important: sleep.

No, no, I don't mean it's time to go back to sleep (though it's frightfully cold where we are, reader, so if you must work from your PJs and slippers—that's allowed.) This issue is all about getting ready for the upcoming year, and what better place to start in the dead of winter than revisiting sleep health? Too many people neglect their sleep health, and"grind culture" has only made this mindset worse.

Sleep is essential—for our moods, for our overall health and of course, our skin too—without which the skin barrier, can't function properly.

So, to get you started for the new year, we'll be keying you into all the cool tech clients are expecting to see in treatment rooms for a comprehensive wellness experience. We'll also be letting you in on some nifty tips and tricks to boost sales even in the post-holiday slump (remember, gift-giving season may be over, but resolution season has just begun!)

We'll also be taking things back to the basics so you have all the insight you need for setting up your clients with the necessary foundation for optimal results, because we all know that a clean slate is perhaps the best part of a new year.

We're keeping hydrated, informed and relevant in 2026's inaugural skin barrier-sleep health-AI issue.

Wishing you well,



Kitty S. Lin

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Randy Zeno

By Kitty Lin



Randy Zeno

In a product, treatment and trend-flooded world, distinguishing your brand is an uphill battle. We bury ourselves in marketing language like "SEO" and "conversions", start seeing it in every aspect of our lives and obsess over the algorithm. It can feel like the baseline amount of work to make our brands sing is unreachable, but that's not true.

While getting your brand out in the world and among the people is critical, churning out an endless stream of content in the hopes of unlocking the secrets buried in social media isn't the end goal.

Randy Zeno, CEO of INNOVÉ Beauty & Wellness talks about the engine powering the brand's momentum, and his insight gleans an aspect of business that'll never go out of style.

"We have a responsibility to the people and respecting the consumer," Zeno says. "Respecting their well-being, respecting the planet." Every decision he makes for INNOVÉ is motivated by considering what the consumer might need, which means keeping the company's skin care and spray tanning booths accessible and affordable. INNOVÉ's been a provider of beauty and wellness solutions for more than 20 years, but it's not just about keeping people happy with what they see on the outside.

Zeno adds: "It's also about the inside, ensuring that they [clients] really like what they see in the mirror."

Sit a While in Their Booth

When it comes to staying grounded in the needs of the consumer, Zeno reflects on his own buying habits as well; he considers himself a member of INNOVÉ WellFit's—the brand's full-body skin care line—target audience. The whole world is passionate about healthy, radiant skin, so all brands need to do is meet consumers where they already are. This is why he wants to ensure that INNOVÉ is accessible both in and out of the home, and why the brand has a diverse line of products.

"[WellFit] invokes a fusion of wellness and personalization," explains Zeno. "The different versions allow you to mix and match." For example, users can choose certain attributes like hydration, depending on what their goals and priorities are, while also choosing the type of care they need, lip care, for instance.

WellFit products were designed with skin's appearance and health in mind, Norvell is INNOVÉ's professional line, while Mystic and VersaSpa give buyers options in booth type according to their needs.

"Unity [Mystic] embodies the fusion between beauty and wellness, but there's also a fragrance and skin tone component, and then experience and craftsmanship," he says.

These different flavors of personalization are key. "It's the power of choice," reinforces Zeno. As a company, INNOVÉ is quick to adapt, adjusting to consumer expectations for wellness, both inside and out. Achieving the success that INNOVÉ has comes with honoring the trust consumers put into the brand, and that means being transparent about what's in the products INNOVÉ uses, what the booths do and making education on the brand's offerings and vision accessible.

Zeno adds: "It's about this experience economy we live in, of bringing experience to the market globally, to folks who don't know we exist, and to make their lives better. It's been a real joy to lead this company through this transformation, particularly as the world of skin care changes."

Background: Image by pal1983; Courtesy of INNOVÉ

Comprehensive Success

INNOVÉ prides itself in merging its technological innovations with its approach to science-backed skin care, allowing the brand to offer something unique: a nourishing full-body skin care treatment. "When you think about it, skin's the largest organ we have," muses Zeno. Being a successful skin care brand isn't as simple as being "prescriptive, especially when everyone's needs are so different.

It's not just a matter of having a specific skin condition or type, but also what about their lifestyle? What factors exacerbate their condition, and what's feasible for them to maintain within their regimen? This is what powers INNOVÉ's approach to innovation. As far as where exactly that approach will continue to take the brand, the most we were able to get was that INNOVÉ is moving full steam ahead.

> *"There are some big things in store, in terms of elevating visibility in the beauty, tech and science worlds…"*

Zeno teases: "There are some big things in store, in terms of elevating visibility in the beauty, tech and science worlds…"

If his strategy is anything to go by, we can take away this: demand being lucrative is one thing, and a rather important thing at that, but it's certainly not the only factor. If demand's not the issue with your brand, advocacy might be.

"It's part art and part science," Zeno says. "The innovation process is about working through this balance. Sometimes you ask people about an idea, and they don't even know what it is! Then you know that education and exposure is the bottleneck."

Tracking industry movement effectively isn't just a matter of seeing where communities are craving something specific, but whether they're even aware of everything that's on the menu, something that Zeno became acquainted with when he worked in the food and beverage industry.

Bottlenecks in Beauty

One area we've seen improvement in advocacy is men's aesthetics; Zeno attests that INNOVÉ does really well with men. The brand also targets millennials, as well as those from Gen X and Gen Z. Seeing as there's not a super siloed performance across ages, and how a demographic that's easing more into aesthetics, beauty and personal care responds super well to INNOVÉ, Zeno and his team can see that their focus should be on placement and what sort of messaging works best according to where consumers are showing up.

The way the brand's messaging has evolved reflects the observable changes in the industry at large: there's no such thing as "aging out" of beauty, and skin radiance and health are for more than just one range of skin tones. Full-body glow isn't reserved for one "ideal" body type that would exclude almost everyone participating in the real-world market.

"It's about the core things," Zeno reaffirms. "Placement and messaging."

Of course, different movements ebb and wane in industries as consumer priorities change—often as a result of the dialogue between various industries, the sociopolitical climate and the mainstream cultural dialogue. Zeno characterizes the current era like so:

"With the consumer being as educated as they currently are, advancements in skin tech have a lot of runway space." Skin health diagnostics and even savvier customization tools are just a few at the top of his mind. These aren't limited to the B2B market either; the consumer market is quickly trying to get its arms around AI, leading to a myriad of personal AI shoppers, service-finding platforms and regimens generated by the new household name ChatGPT, acting as a makeshift consultant, springing forth. Zeno draws a throughline between these tools and the long-building diagnostic movement as more aware consumers have sharpened their buying habits according to their skin's needs and what has provided proven results. Simply: the evolution of diagnostics demands better customization tools.

As for what's exciting INNOVÉ, there's a lot: an Australian subsidiary, an updated booth portfolio embedded in this whole notion of skin health and the launch of the Unity Booth. The brand also took center stage at CES 2026 in Las Vegas, the world's largest stage for consumer technology and innovation, in January, where it showcased the new WELLFIT Powered by Mystic to a global audience of industry leaders, media and trendsetters.

Zeno marvels: "I move fast and intentional, but wow!"

Kitty Lin is the managing editor of *Skin Inc.*



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THE BARRIER BLUEPRINT: Strong Skin Starts Here

By Alex Hernandez

It seems like everywhere consumers and professionals look, it's "skin barrier this" and "skin barrier that", but a focus on the skin barrier is far from a marketing ploy. It's the foundation of everything we hope to build toward our clients' success. Whether you're focused on basic, healthy skin facials or advanced brightening treatments, a resilient barrier must be the starting point. However, that's also where many of us slip: we prioritize barrier repair early on, then stop nurturing it throughout the client's journey. Maintaining that balance has only gotten harder in a world where everyone wants everything now. As professionals, it's on us to slow our clients down, set clear expectations and help them learn to respect what their skin truly needs.



Understanding the Barrier

Think of the skin barrier as a brick wall shielding the body—a living structure made of cells, lipids, water-binding molecules and microbial life. It's a visual that works beautifully in client conversations because it helps illustrate why we can't chase every exciting acid or active without also supporting the skin's foundation.

In this metaphor, the corneocytes are the bricks. The lipid lamellae between them (primarily ceramides, cholesterol and free fatty acids) form the mortar that locks those bricks into place and keeps the barrier sealed. Inside each brick live the Natural Moisturizing Factors (NMFs), the internal water reservoirs that keep corneocytes hydrated, flexible and able to fit tightly into the lipid mortar. When these internal reserves drop, the bricks dry out, shrink and the entire structure becomes more vulnerable.

Here's a broken-down explanation to really paint the picture:

The Bricks: Corneocytes

These flattened, protein-rich cells make up the outermost layer of the skin. Their job is simple but essential: create the physical structure of the barrier. When they are well-hydrated and intact, they form a smooth, even, resilient surface.

The Mortar: The Lipid Matrix

Between every corneocyte is a highly organized mixture of ceramides, cholesterol and free fatty acids. These lipids arrange themselves into lamellar sheets that seal the barrier, prevent transepidermal water loss (TEWL) and keep irritants out. Without this "mortar," even the healthiest corneocytes can't hold the wall together.

Inside the Bricks: Natural Moisturizing Factors (NMFs)

NMFs sit within each corneocyte, acting like built-in humidifiers. This blend of amino acids, sodium PCA, lactate, urea, sugars and electrolytes draws water into the cells and helps them stay plump enough to interlock with the lipid mortar. When NMFs are depleted, the bricks lose volume, leading to cracking, flaking and increased reactivity.

The Sealant: The Microbiome& Antimicrobial Peptides

Layered over the entire structure is an invisible "sealant" made up of the skin's microbiome and antimicrobial peptides. This ecosystem acts as the first line of defense, helping regulate inflammation,

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maintain a healthy pH, prevent pathogenic overgrowth and support wound healing. A balanced microbiome keeps the entire wall more stable and resilient.

Repairing and Maintaining the Barrier

Once clients understand the "brick wall," the next step is showing them how to rebuild it, and more importantly, how to keep it strong through all the seasons their skin will move through. Barrier care isn't always glamorous or exciting, but it's the reason every corrective strategy has room to succeed. The part we must remember and reinforce is that barrier repair isn't one magical product. It's the synergy of decisions made at every single step of the routine. When each step reinforces structure, hydration and resilience, the skin stays calm, adaptable and ready for corrective work.

Below is a home care strategy you can use to build your client's barrier focused regimens. Once the barrier is healthy, start adding in corrective products like an exfoliating serum before the hydrating step.

1. Cleansers: Keep the Foundation Calm

Every balanced routine starts with a gentle, non-stripping cleanse. This sets the tone for everything that follows. What to look for:

- Antioxidants (green tea, mushroom extract)
- Amino-acid-based surfactants
- Humectants like glycerin

2. Toners: Rehydrate and Replenish

Think of toners as a drink of water for the barrier. They saturate the skin with lightweight hydration so serums can do their job more effectively. Barrier-friendly choices include:

- Multi-weight hyaluronic acid
- Fructooligosaccharides, sodium PCA
- Panthenol

3. Hydrators: Rebuild the Structure

Serums and gels are where we can strategically enhance the skin's ability to calm, repair and respond. Reach for formulations with:

- Ceramides (NP, AP, EOP)
- Prebiotics
- Beta-glucan, centella asiatica



Moisturizers are essential for barrier health, as they replenish lipids.

4. Moisturizers: Seal and Support

Moisturizers are the finishing touch that keeps everything in place. The right moisturizer supports the lipid matrix and prevents unnecessary transepidermal water loss (TEWL). Look for:

- Ceramides, peptides
- Squalane& fatty acids like linoleic or linolenic
- Phytosterols

5. Sunscreen: Protect the Entire Structure

UV exposure is like weather damage to the skin barrier—it breaks down lipids, depletes NMFs, stresses the microbiome and increases inflammation. Daily SPF use is barrier care, period. Mineral options powered by zinc oxide offer broad-spectrum protection while naturally calming redness and irritation, making them ideal for reactive clients. For clients who prefer a cosmetically elegant finish, modern chemical filters provide high UVA/UVB protection without the white cast that often discourages consistent use. Formulas enriched with humectants and skin-conditioning ingredients help maintain NMF levels throughout the day, which is especially important for those working on tone, brightness and pigmentation. When SPF is chosen intentionally, it becomes more than a sun protectant; it becomes a daily reinforcement of the skin's structural resilience.

Barrier health doesn't have to be the "boring part" of skin care; it's the part that makes everything else possible. When we help clients understand the mechanics behind their skin, they're more willing to slow down, stay consistent and lean into the supportive products that actually improve skin health. When the bricks stay hydrated, the mortar stays intact, and the microbial seal stays balanced, the skin becomes calmer, clearer, stronger and infinitely more predictable.



Alex Hernandez is a licensed esthetician and the clinic manager and lead educator at the Face Reality Acne Clinic in San Leandro, CA. She became a Face Reality Certified Acne Expert in 2018 and has worked with hundreds of acne clients in her esthetics career.

Clockwise from top: Image by Kabardins photo at Adobe Stock; Image by KMPZZZ at Adobe Stock



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The Wellness Approach to **ACNE**

By Samantha Dench

Acne is such a common problem we see in our treatment rooms. It seems like almost every client nowadays suffers from acne. As estheticians, we are trained to focus topically to clear our clients' skin. How do we better ourselves to help our clients navigate lifestyle and stress, while battling the information overload on social media?

This is the unique approach to treating acne differently to clear clients' skin.

Many estheticians go into our line of work either because we were able to heal our own skin problems or because we love helping people. Let's talk about how you can improve the way you approach clients and treat acne. We're going to cover four main ideas: the skin barrier and acne, the impacts of sleep and lifestyle and how to manage and treat acne.

Before we get into the skin part of it, though, I want to start with busting some of the acne myths all over the web, starting with everyone suddenly being a skin expert.

I dare you to go on any social media platform and type in the word acne. The sheer amount of information is overwhelming. Let's start there, the somewhat aware enthusiast has now become an online skin consultant, and even actual experts like dermatologists and estheticians are soaking up the limelight by sharing their favorite over-the-counter skin care products to fight acne. It's hard to stand out as an expert these days because the world is in a state of information overload.

It's important to understand this because our job as estheticians is to educate our clients, and doing it well means that we need to understand where they're getting their information from. This can help you learn how to pivot when talking to clients. The modern-day client now has more skin care knowledge than ever before.

Another fad I've been seeing on social media is the hormone-friendly diet. Women tend to suffer the most from hormonal acne in their 30s, 40s and 50s. We are seeing more women coming in due to hormonal acne, and they're frustrated because their doctors tell them to come back when they hit menopause. They feel alone and suffer in silence with their perimenopause and menopause symptoms. Estheticians must understand this is what's going on to help our clients navigate these difficult times and help support their skin.

Understand that many of our clients suffer because their skin problems are coming from within. We know to tell clients to stop eating junk food and sugar, but do we understand why? As an esthetician studying functional medicine, I've started to dig deeper into the root causes of clients' skin problems, and helping their skin during hormonal shifts has been rewarding.

We have to be careful not to give nutrition advice, because that is out of our scope of practice; however, we can make general suggestions to clients, such as promoting hydration and cutting back on alcohol consumption. The Institute for Functional Medicine says, "Nutrition influences tissue or cellular sensitivity to hormone signals in different ways: by direct or indirect paths and based on dietary patterns or specific nutrients." If we have clients who struggle to respond to our facial treatments or products, I might suggest they seek out a naturopathic or functional medicine doctor to do some gut or extensive hormone testing, as this might be the missing piece they're searching for.

Now, let's shift gears and talk about skin concerns and how we can help our clients in the treatment room.

The Skin Barrier and Acne

By the time a client books an appointment with us, they've probably been doing a lot of different things to their skin. They've tried a hundred products, gone on social media to learn the hottest dos and don'ts; maybe they've tried a dermatologist and have learned more about their skin. The modern client is well researched.



Severe acne compromises the skin barrier, which can result in increased water loss.

Image by K.A./peopleimages.com at Adobe Stock

Our job is to help them understand that what they've learned and tried has caused their acne to worsen. It starts with the skin barrier because most acne clients use harsh products that break down their skin barrier, either from layering acids, stripping the skin with harsh acne products or over-exfoliating.

We need to focus on hydration and skin barrier repair. Hydrating and calming facials, red light therapy and gentle enzymes can be a great place to start with new clients. We also need to simplify their skin care routine at home. I strip my acne client's skin care down to four products: a gentle cleanser, weekly enzyme or gommage exfoliant, moisturizer and SPF. They use this program for two months, and once I feel their skin barrier is restored, then we can add in acne products and serums. The goal is to get their acid mantle and skin barrier to rebalance and reset to neutral; otherwise, they can't be successful in treating their skin.

Sleep and Acne

Poor sleep also impacts the skin and can aggravate acne, because when we have poor quality sleep or don't sleep enough, cortisol increases, which in turn increases oil production, slows down cell turnover and causes hormonal imbalances. Not only do we handle stress less effectively after poor sleep, but poor sleep quality can be caused by stress too, which further increases cortisol.

It's like running on a hamster wheel.

Here's what you can do to help clients who struggle with sleep: create a calm space where they can feel seen, heard and begin to relax their mind and body. Encourage them to incorporate deep breathing, meditation or mindfulness at home. The goal is for them to create space in their day to focus on their calm and mindfulness during a stressful time in their life.

Managing and Treating Acne

Incorporating these elements into your acne-prone client education can go a long way. Often, we look at the skin and instantly work to fix the outside, without understanding that it's the inside that needs healing. Introducing this into your treatment room not only creates space for our clients to feel safe, but also gives them useful tools they can implement into their daily life to understand that acne is more than a surface-level skin condition.

Clients may feel like their acne appeared overnight, but under the skin, their acne has been building up. Educate them and teach them that it will take time to heal their skin. This isn't an overnight fix, and you will be their guide to help them stay on track and stay positive during the healing process. Adding in little touch points like a follow-up text to check in or sending an email with a quick mindfulness tip they can do goes a long way with both education and building connection.



Poor sleep health can worsen acne by contributing to inflammation.

As estheticians, we have the gift of healing and understanding that acne is more than just a surface-level skin condition. Understanding all the ways we can use this gift will help us become better at our craft and cut through the chatter.



Samantha Dench is a licensed esthetician, entrepreneur and educator with over two decades of experience helping clients achieve clear skin from the inside out. As the founder of Skin Deep Esthetics, she takes a holistic approach, addressing the root causes of skin issues by understanding the connection between internal wellness and external beauty.

Currently a student of functional medicine, Dench blends functional medicine with esthetics to empower clients and professionals alike to view skin care through a whole-body lens. She's also the creator and host of The Functional Aesthetician Podcast, where she shares insights on how gut health, nutrition, hormones and lifestyle impact skin health.

A passionate advocate for education and clean skin care, Samantha founded Zozo Skincare, a safe skin care line for tweens. When she's not working with clients or recording her podcast, this single mom of three finds balance in walks, baths, journaling and spending time with her kids.

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BEATING THE WINTER SKIN BARRIER AND HYDRATION STRUGGLE

By Victoria Tabak

Every esthetician knows that cold months typically accompany naturally lower humidity, continuously running heating systems and, for some, forgetting to drink water consistently throughout the day, as well as indulging in hotter showers.

Consequently, winter weather skin challenges arise that need to be addressed. The most common client concerns include skin dryness, tightness and hyper reactivity that may look and feel like irritation, redness, peeling and even breakouts in some individuals. A disrupted skin barrier is the ultimate culprit for the bouquet of winter-related skin issues. Even the healthiest skin barrier struggles with remaining stoic in the face of environmental stressors that lead to a visibly dull, lackluster, glow-deprived complexion, not to mention the discomfort experienced from having an imbalanced skin barrier. Proactively and effectively delivering successful treatments and recommended home care results is essential to nurture the skin, client experience and a high level of gratification. Demystifying the dynamic nature and science behind the skin barrier function is the key to supporting a healthy skin barrier throughout the changing seasons.



The skin market's growing awareness for barrier-conscious care has contributed to the industry's inclusivity efforts as an ephasis on working with the natural chemisty of different skin types and tones.

Skin Barrier Refresher

The skin barrier, also interchangeably known as the acid mantle, literally means an acidic covering. It is divinely designed to protect the outermost layer of the skin. It is made up of natural oils, lipids, and skin cells, or more specifically, corneocytes that make up the outermost layer of the epidermis. The primary function of the barrier is protection. It serves as the front-line defense against external aggressors, including those imposed by environmental variables. Simultaneously, it combats the adverse potential of trans epidermal water loss (TEWL).

An ideal pH range of healthy, balanced skin is between 4.5 and 6.3, leaning slightly acidic. The acidity facilitates a proper lipid spread and an optimal skin barrier environment for a healthy microbiome, the invisible part of the skin's ecosystem made up of trillions of microorganisms. Fun fact: oilier skin types naturally have a more acidic pH than dry skin. Though it is potentially more prone to breakouts and acne, on the flip side, the lower pH helps the skin better defend against environmental assaults. To add, oily skin tends to age at a slower rate than dry skin.

An alkaline or high pH skin barrier means it is disrupted, also referred to as being compromised. The signature baseline symptoms of a compromised barrier are sensitivity, redness and irritation. The hypersensitivity of the skin can easily be determined by gently pressing down on a cheek, jawline or forehead and noticing the distinct color contrast between where pressure was applied and the surrounding area. The visible dehydration of the skin and increased reactivity to irritants are collateral results. A prolonged alkaline pH barrier weakens lipid cohesion and disrupts enzymatic processes, ultimately, the root cause of winter weather skin problems, which are common around this time of the year.



Winter Skin Blues

Between the cold gusts of wind, the still-chilling dry outdoor air, the forced hot air from central heating systems and not hydrating enough, winter often creates the perfect storm for dehydrated, winter skin blues. The already low humidity outside, combined with indoor dry air, forces stratum corneum water loss and evaporation, the classic case of TEWL. Add space heaters and long hot showers to this skin assault, and you've further accelerated the skin-parching process.

The multi-dimensional moisture-declining skin saga leads to skin that is less elastic, less supple and far from resilient. Let's not forget to mention that it can develop micro-cracks in bad-case scenarios. The outcome?

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Winter is a good time to be even more wary of harsh products, as they can dry out skin more.

Dry and uncomfortable skin tightness; ashy flaking or peeling skin; sensitivity and redness; an unpleasant stinging or burning sensation from the irritated skin and even unexpected breakouts in acne-prone individuals.

The last symptom, breakouts, is the one that's most unexpected and often surprises clients. The opportunistic bacterium, known as *Propionibacterium acnes* (*P. acnes*), which was recently renamed *Cutibacterium acnes (C. acnes)*, resides on the surface of the skin. When met with ideal conditions, such as dehydrated skin, the bacteria thrive. When oily skin is dried, it perceives an oil deficiency. In response, the sebaceous glands begin to work extra hard to try to self-correct the barrier disruption, leading to overcompensation. In turn, the sebaceous glands produce oil excessively, causing it to sit and even pool on the surface of the skin. This creates a breeding ground for the bacteria to grow. The active *C. acnes* bacterium travels down the hair follicle or pore, combined with dead skin cell congestion, ultimately triggering inflammation expressed as papules and even pustules.

Winter Time Barrier Disruption

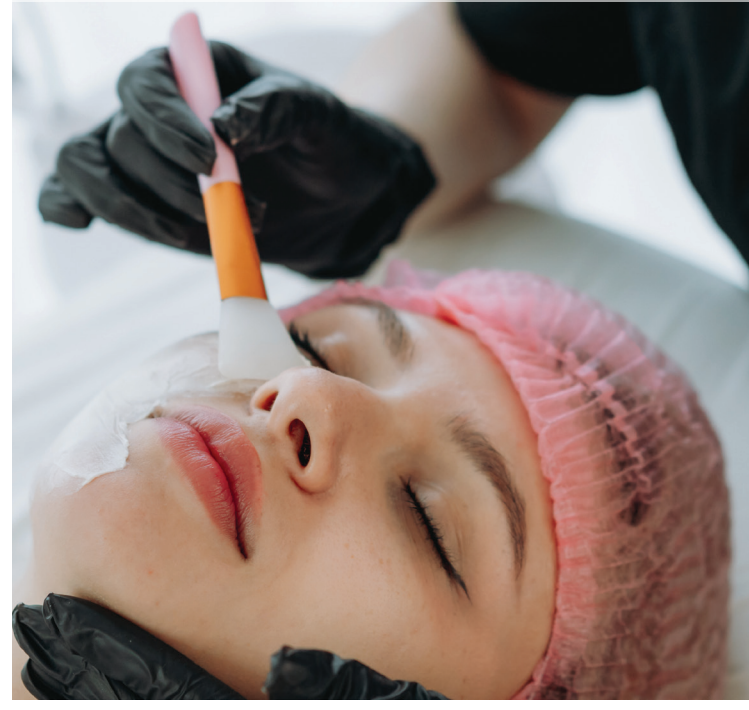
An optimal skin barrier is fostered by having a well-balanced lipid matrix made up of naturally occurring cholesterols, ceramides and fatty acids to prevent TEWL. For a deeper understanding, imagine the skin barrier as a brick-and-mortar wall: the skin cells, or bricks, are cemented by the lipid matrix, the mortar. During the winter, harsh environmental conditions cause a loss of lipids. This deficiency enables water molecules to evaporate as a result of insufficient lubricants on the skin, exposing it to irritants. In other words, the skin's"mortar" is compromised and not serving as it should.

Healthy skin turnover rate ranges from 28 to 40 days, but not when it's confronted with a disrupted barrier. It's common for the cell turnover rate to slow during the winter. The slower rate means there is an accumulation of corneocytes or dead skin cells sitting on the surface of the skin. This can cause atypical sensitivity and prevent optimal product penetration, rendering skin care less effective. When treating clients during these cold months, the first stage must always be to repair the barrier function before even considering corrective work.

Restoring The Barrier

Restoring balance is at the root of the solution to help clients revitalize and restore the skin's barrier function and resilience. It requires a delicate dance between exfoliating the skin to boost cell turnover and clear out accumulated dead skin cells while working to protect, revitalize and renew. A holistic approach is essential for bringing skin back to life promptly. This includes

When restoring a compromised barrier, avoiding fragrances, dyes and even actives like AHAs may be necessary.



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addressing both external and internal factors. Factoring in the environment, nutrition and the ever-client-coveted topicals, establishing an unwavering commitment to routine consistency can help clients synergistically offset winter skin blues.

Optimize the environment as much as possible. Keep it hydrated by having humidifiers at the practice. Suggest that clients do the same at their home and place of work. It can be as simple as having a small tabletop unit to help combat dehydration. Staying hydrated from the inside is essential, too. Encourage clients to continue drinking plenty of water throughout the day. Even suggestions like getting a favorite new water bottle or drinking from a straw have inspired some to drink more water. Before getting to topical skin care, educate your clients on *eating* their skin care. Foods high in healthy fatty acids support restoring the skin's barrier lipids, while foods high in omega-3, like chia seeds, flaxseed, walnuts and salmon have anti-inflammatory benefits.

Topically, the skin has to go through a series of stages. Use gentle low concentrations of enzymes and fruit acids like alpha hydroxy acids (AHA) to exfoliate the skin and pave the way to skin regeneration. This will boost cell turnover and enable better product absorption and effectiveness. Be careful not to over-exfoliate or further alkalinize the skin because this will cause further irritation and delay skin recovery. Hydrate, moisturize and protect the skin. Emollient and occlusive ingredients like sea buckthorn, squalene, beeswax or jojoba, function as a protective seal for the skin, relating it back to the mortar idea, which helps strengthen lipid barrier function by locking in hydration.

Formulas combining humectants like hyaluronic acid and glycerin, followed by some of the lubricating ingredients mentioned above, work in tandem to hydrate and lock moisture in to prevent skin dehydration in reverse. Guiding clients to get on a barrier-forward routine is essential, and getting them to stick with it is equally important. If clients are already on a strong corrective regimen, the best advice is to scale back for the time being and simplify the routine for the wintertime.

Final Thoughts

A healthy skin barrier isn't just about aesthetics; it's about wellness and skin vitality. Though the cold winter months can stir skin chaos for those unprepared, staying educated, proactive and empowered equips the professional to help clients evade those wintertime skin troubles. It's an opportunistic time for every skin professional to step up as a coach and practitioner that clients can trust and keep coming back to. Helping clients better understand the science behind a healthy skin barrier and the importance of maintaining its balance empowers them, elevates the customer experience and most importantly, builds unmatched trust.

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Victoria Tabak is a two-time international award-winning, oncology-trained licensed esthetician; published skin and wellness expert and a nationally recognized skin care educator advocating for a holistic approach to aging beautifully. With more than 28 years of experience in the professional beauty industry and a master's degree in business with a minor in chemistry, she bridges science and soul in skin care education. As a content creator and influential voice in holistic aesthetics, Tabak inspires both professionals and clients to embrace skin health as a reflection of inner balance, self-care and empowerment.

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emerginC's "WALK IN THE WOODS" Facial

Suggested Time Length: 50-60 minutes | **Skin Types:** All skin types

Skin Care Concerns: Dryness, dehydration, sensitivity, fine lines, loss of elasticity, sun damage, uneven skin tone and texture, devitalized skin.

Products Required: Clean, Boreal Tonic, Red Berry Dual Mask & Gommage, Eye & Lip Craft, Blend, Phytocell Detox Mask, Water Lily Radiant Recovery Mask, Salvation Serum, Aromatic Booster Spray, Tinted Sun SPF+

Temporal and Occipital Massage:
Apply a small amount of Clean to the ring fingers. Gently begin at the client's temple and perform small, slow figure 8s on the temples. Repeat 6 cycles. Perform figure 8s around the orbital eye, ending at the temples. Using fingertips, gently massage hairline in small, circular motions, working downward towards ears along base of skull towards occipital ridge. Perform occipital ridge holds for 10 seconds. Optional: You may mist an aromatic booster spray of the client's choice 6 inches above the face before the temporal and occipital massage.

Eye makeup removal (optional):
Apply a pea-sized amount of Clean onto 2 dampened cotton rounds. Apply 1 cotton round to each eye and remove makeup (if applicable).

Cleanse:

1. Apply Clean to dry skin. Perform cleansing techniques. Add water and cleanse skin. Remove with Raw Cloth, cotton pads, esthetic wipes or preferred esthetic method of removal (steam is optional.)

Tone:

2. Apply Boreal Tonic to cotton and gently wipe over skin.

Gommage Exfoliant/First Mask:

3. Apply Red Berry Dual Mask & Gommage onto skin and move fingertips in circular motions. Leave on for 10 minutes, until dry. After 10 minutes, rub in a circular motion all over face until gommage/mask crumbles off. Remove excess with warm water or a dampened towel.

Extractions (optional):
Apply 20-30 drops of Fast Extract Step 1 and gently massage into skin. Do not remove. Apply Fast Extract Step 2 in a mask-like layer onto the face and steam skin for 7-10 minutes while performing extractions. Gently wipe Boreal Tonic over skin with a cotton round or esthetic wipe.

Massage (optional):
Lightly mist two sprays of the client's choice of aromatic booster spray 5-6 inches above the client's face, neck and décolleté. Apply Blend onto face, neck and décolleté. Perform facial massage for 10 minutes. Gently wipe Boreal Tonic over skin with a cotton round or esthetic wipe.

Second Mask:

4. Apply Phytocell Detox Mask (pigmentation/breakouts/dry skin), water lily radiant mask (sensitive/redness) or Vitamin C + Retinol Mask (anti-aging/pigmentation/oily) over face, neck and décolleté. Leave on for 10 minutes and remove with warm, steamed towel or preferred esthetic method of removal.

* Perform hand/arm massage with Raw Body Oil

Serum:

5. Apply Salvation Serum to clean, dry skin. Gently press into face, neck and décolleté.
6. Apply Eyelight Serum along orbital bone of both eyes.

Moisturize/Protect:

7. Apply a small amount of Eye & Lip Craft along orbital bone of both eyes.
   Optional: *Apply to areas of natural highlights.*
8. Apply Blend (dry/dehydrated) or Raw Facial Oil (normal/oily) to face, neck and décolleté.
9. Apply Eye & Lip Craft with cotton swab to lips.

   Optional: *Apply Sun SPF 30+. Gently press into face, neck and décolleté.*

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TECHNOLOGY IN THE TREATMENT ROOM:

Enhancing the Guest Experience

By Sherrie Tennessee

The spa and wellness industry stands at a transformative crossroads where precision technology meets personalized care. With the global medical spa market projected to expand from $17.2 billion in 2023 to $59.4 billion by 2033, wellness professionals are discovering that technology amplifies rather than replaces human expertise. Three innovators share how their technologies are reshaping treatment rooms while elevating guest experiences.

Precision Fit Technology: Solving the Measurement Problem

Aurelia Edwards, a polymer chemist with a master's degree in cosmetic science and more than 25 years in the beauty, spa and wellness industries, recognized that the nail industry faced a fundamental challenge. Beautiful designs consistently fell short due to imperfect fit, creating unnecessary waste and compromising client confidence.

Through Standard Measure Technologies and the NailQ platform, Edwards brought computer vision and photogrammetry into the treatment room. The technology maps each nail's dimensions and curvature with sub-millimeter accuracy using only a phone or tablet. Within two minutes, clients scan a QR code, hold their hand to the camera and receive a complete sizing profile.

"The goal was never to add steps; it was to remove friction, reduce waste and give people the quiet confidence that comes from a flawless fit," Aurelia explains. For operators, setup requires minimal disruption with a QR placard at reception or a tablet on the counter that integrates seamlessly into existing processes.



Tech innovations have streamlined many processes in the industry, meaning a lower chance of adverse reactions.



Investing in new tech now can mean mitigating future bottlenecks.

The technology unlocks new revenue opportunities through personalization. The sticker sets are sized to each guest, limited-edition press-on drops and maintenance kits drive repeat purchases beyond the treatment room. Spas can bundle sizing plus quick-apply sticker services as express menu items or pre-size event packages for weddings and retreats.

Broader pilots have shown 300% higher engagement with fit-matched options, approximately 25% higher repeat purchase rates and roughly 30% growth in average order value. Professionals report having more room for artistry because the fit is already handled. Edwards is expanding precision from fingers to toes, with precision-fit pedicures slated for Q1 2026.

LED Innovation: Transforming Lash Services

Soo-Jin Yang, Founder and CEO of illumino Lashes based in Las Vegas, solved lash retention issues by reimagining adhesive technology. Inspired by childhood memories of LED devices curing bonding agents on clear braces, Yang spent years developing what became the Lynk-Gel Method, the world's first patented LED lash extension system.

Traditional lash applications relied heavily on room humidity and temperature, leading to frustration with slow-drying glue, unpredictable retention and fumes

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that caused eye irritation. After years of research and development, Yang launched the Lynk-Gel LED device and adhesive system, engineered and certified to global safety standards of IEC 62471 and ANSI RP-27 photobiological safety standards. The system uses an LED that peaks in the visible-light wavelength, curing the adhesive in seconds and creating a bond that resists oils, lotions and makeup while remaining gentle on natural lashes.

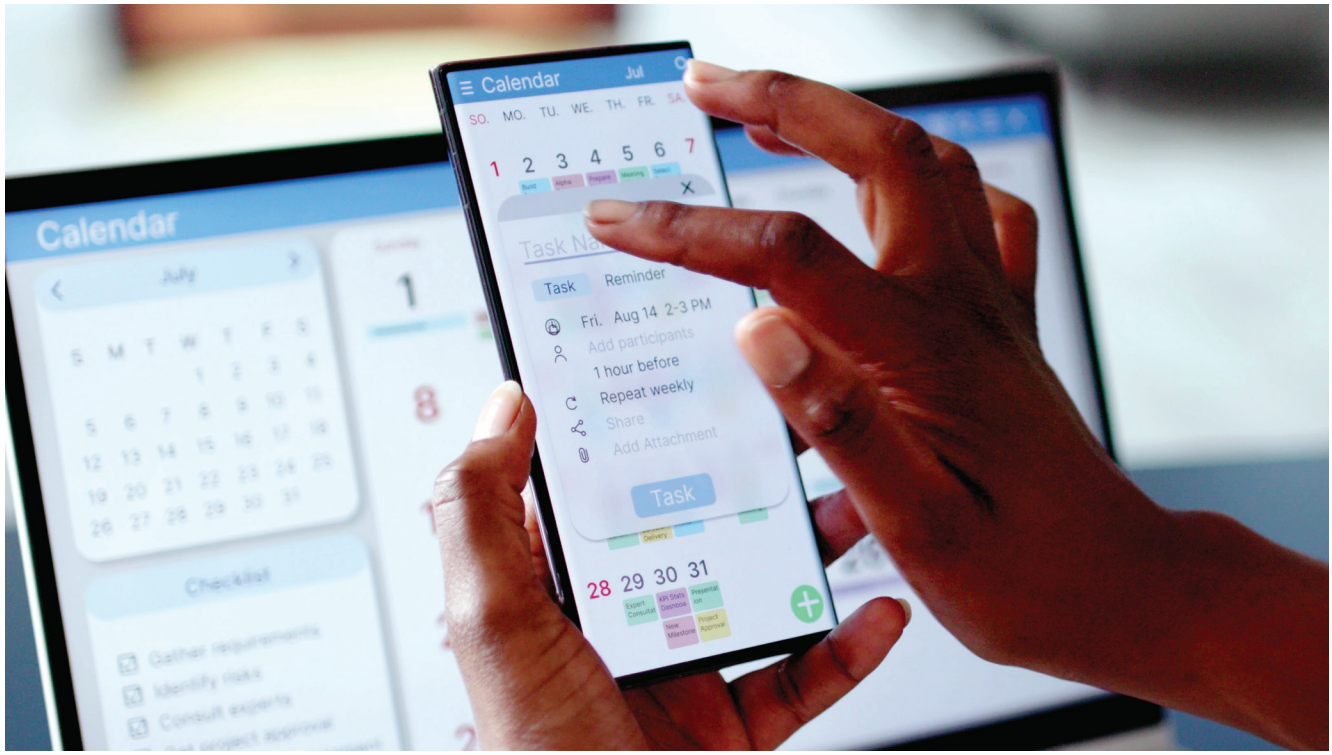
The impact on client experience proved immediate and measurable. "Clients immediately notice the difference: longer-lasting, gentler and softer adhesive with virtually no fumes, no stinging and no waiting to get lashes wet," Yang stated. The Lynk-Gel curing method uses a pinpoint LED precisely at the lash-to-lash bond, not on the skin, ensuring each natural lash remains healthy and able to grow and shed in its natural cycle.

For lash professionals, the technology offers total control and predictability. Each lash bond sets instantly, allowing artists to create clean, smooth bonds; advanced lash mapping and reduced service time while maintaining stunning retention results. On average, clients experience up to six weeks of lash retention, meaning fewer fill appointments and happier, long-term clients.

Since the 2019 official launch, illumino-certified lash artists reported significant improvements in both artistry and business performance. Service times reduced by up to 25%, and client retention soared. For studio owners, increased appointments per day and loyal returning clients translated directly to revenue growth.

LED therapy represents broader market momentum, with the global B2B market projected to reach $491.6 million by 2033. Clinical studies demonstrate that over 90% of participants showed a reduction in skin roughness and wrinkle depth after LED treatment courses.

Yang emphasizes that safety remains paramount. "The lash industry is rapidly evolving, and artists deserve technology that meets international safety standards, not just marketing claims," she notes. The future of the treatment room lies in merging human artistry with intelligent technology: devices and materials that are safer, faster, stronger and smarter.



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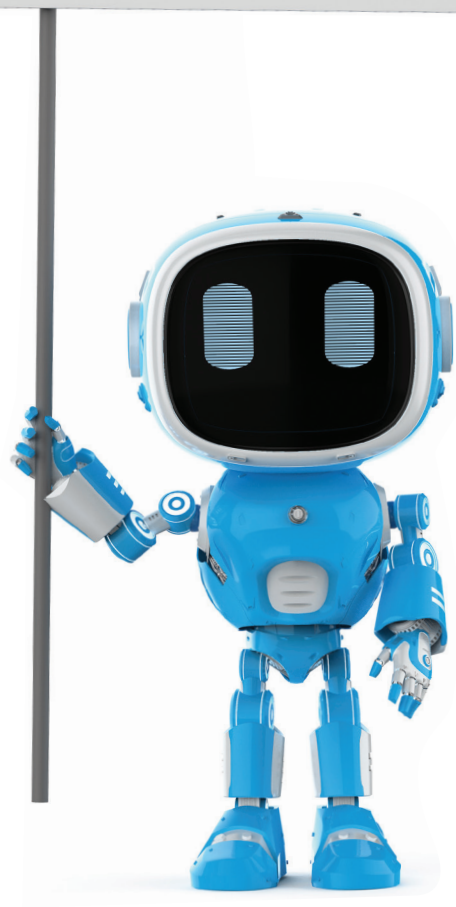
State-of-the-art tech integration in spas means sharing more, for more personalized client experiences.

"When the esthetician feels calm and confident, the guest senses it, treatments feel more present, conversations flow naturally and the professional's energy returns to what truly matters: care and craft."



Unified Systems: Creating Calm Through Integration

Moshe Edri, CEO of SpaSphere.ai, approached wellness technology from a different angle. With over 15 years of experience working in startups across a range of technologies and extensive technical experience leading teams of DevOps engineers, Moshe recognized that technology had become a double-edged sword for estheticians. Tools meant to create freedom often added noise, forcing professionals to juggle five or six different apps to keep spas running.

Through conversations with estheticians, Edri saw the struggle firsthand. Booking, payments, notes, inventory, websites and marketing all lived in separate worlds that rarely connected, leaving estheticians to sync everything manually. "The problem wasn't effort, it was design," Edri explains. "Our industry has been flooded with single-purpose apps that don't talk to each other, leaving professionals overwhelmed by tech instead of supported by it."

A new generation of AI tools is shifting that dynamic by working quietly and automating busywork so estheticians can focus on touch, connection and care. Modern systems provide digital briefs highlighting who's coming in, their goals, notes from the last visit and suggestions for upselling services or products clients already love. Professionals walk into treatment rooms informed and present, not distracted by paperwork or screen-hopping.

AI-assisted SOAP notes now take just two or three minutes to complete, capturing key insights during or after each session while tracking usage for cost analysis and client safety. When visits end, systems automatically generate branded follow-up emails in the esthetician's own voice, summarizing regimens, suggesting retail items and offering one-click rebooking.

Early adopters of connected approaches are seeing measurable impact: faster note completion, higher rebooking rates and less cognitive overload. "When the esthetician feels calm and confident, the guest senses it," Edri notes. "Treatments feel more present, conversations flow naturally and the professional's energy returns to what truly matters: care and craft."

The industry is entering a new chapter defined not by more technology but by harmony between tools and touch. At SpaSphere, the philosophy remains simple: the best technology whispers, not shouts. AI's role is not to replace connection but to preserve it, giving professionals more time, presence and calm.

The Future of Treatment Rooms

Across these innovations, a common thread emerges. Technology enhances the guest experience by removing friction, increasing precision and giving professionals greater capacity for artistry and connection. Whether through measurement accuracy, adhesive innovation or unified systems, the treatment room of the future

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The future of treatment rooms include marrying tech with biophilic and natural features, to immerse clients in nature from the comfort of the spa and foster better mental health.

adapts to each client while preserving the human expertise that defines exceptional wellness care.

As consumers continue demanding measurable, personalized experiences, wellness professionals equipped with intelligent technology are positioned to meet and exceed expectations. In treatment rooms where technology whispers and human connection remains central, true innovation happens.



Dr. Sherrie Tennessee began her career in the scientific world, where she served as a researcher at prestigious organizations, including Johns Hopkins University and MedImmune. With over 20 years of experience in beauty, spa, and wellness, she has expertly fulfilled roles as a massage therapist, nail tech, spa owner, speaker, professor, and educator. Her expertise in wellness technology and innovation has shaped her contributions to highly respected industry publications and speaking engagements at numerous public forums. Dr. Tennessee is a published author who has collaborated with distinguished organizations, including Johnson and Wales University, Sandals Resorts International—Red Lane Spa, and Mandarin Oriental. She holds a B.S. in Biology and is a Certified Integrative Health and Wellness Coach, along with a Master of Business Administration. Dr. Tennessee earned her Ph.D. in Hospitality Administration from William F. Harrah College of Hospitality, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where she specialized in wellness tourism, wellness technology, and innovation. She continues to bridge the gap between traditional hospitality and modern wellness approaches.



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TIKTOK: The New Beauty Counter for Estheticians

By Armenthia Carr

If you've had a client come in and say, "I saw this on TikTok…" you're not alone. TikTok isn't just entertainment anymore; it's the biggest driver of beauty conversations in the world. For estheticians, this means your clients are often walking into your treatment room already influenced by a video they scrolled past the night before.



TikTok's powerful algorithm increases your visibility according to topic and user interest, rather than limiting you to your follower count.

Why TikTok Matters for Your Practice

TikTok has become the largest "skin counter" in the world. Billions of views under the hashtag#SkinTok prove that consumers are curious about skin care and eager to try what's trending. Here's the key, though: they're not just watching; they're buying. A single viral video can sell out a product line overnight. That means your clients may be trying things at home that affect the way their skin responds to your treatments.

As a licensed professional, this gives you an edge. You don't need to chase every trend, but you do need to understand what's out there so you can meet your clients where they are.

How TikTok Is Changing Client Behavior

Your clients are coming in more informed, but not always more educated. They might ask for a product they saw in a 15-second clip, compare professional treatments to DIY hacks or expect results overnight. TikTok has trained consumers to think fast, but you know real results require time, consistency and professional care.

By acknowledging the trends they bring up, you build trust. Even if you don't recommend every product or hack, showing that you're aware keeps you relevant and credible.

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3 Current TikTok Trends Estheticians Should Know

Here are three of the biggest conversations happening on TikTok right now, and how they may show up in your treatment room:

- **Skin Cycling**: A routine that alternates active ingredients with rest days. Clients may come in asking why their results "stalled" if they skipped exfoliation nights. You can help them customize this concept to their skin type.
- **Glass Skin**: The desire for pore-less, dewy skin. Many clients chase this look with heavy layering, but you can guide them on professional treatments and homecare that support healthy, not over-stripped skin.
- **SPF Sticks**: Portable sunscreen reapplication is trending. Clients may think this replaces full coverage. It's a perfect chance to educate them on proper application and why layering matters.

Why Estheticians Belong on TikTok

The danger of TikTok is misinformation, DIY peels, mixing active ingredients incorrectly or using tools that aren't safe outside of a professional setting. When estheticians share their voices on the platform, they don't just correct myths; they show the behind-the-scenes of what real skin health looks like.

Even if you never post a single video, you can still use TikTok as a listening tool. Scroll the#SkinTok tag and you'll see exactly what your clients are talking about, before they bring it up at their next appointment.



TikTok is the perfect tool for estheticians to showcase before-and-afters, tutorials and action shots that visually demonstrate their work.



TikTok is a powerful creative engine, allowing professionals to use video, music, dance and humor to build out their brand's identity.

Bottom Line

TikTok isn't going away, and it's shaping the way your clients view skin care. By staying plugged into what's trending, you don't have to compete with the noise; you can stand out above it. Your expertise, your training and your treatment room results will always outlast a viral trend, but when you show clients that you get where they're coming from, you become their trusted filter in a world of information overload.



Armenthia Carr is a wife, mother, licensed esthetician, award-winning master educator, mentor and founder of IAMA Artistry LLC. With more than 15 years of experience in Arkansas and Illinois, she has taught in esthetics programs, authored full curricula and mentored over 1,000 beauty professionals in becoming confident, profitable and purpose-driven.

Known for her expertise in skin of color, Carr specializes in melanin-rich skin and hyperpigmentation, offering science-backed education and transformative results for clients who are often underserved within the skin care industry. Her ability to blend advanced technique, cultural understanding and compassion has made her a trusted leader in esthetics education.

As a content creator (@ur.skin.therapist) on TikTok, Facebook and Instagram, Carr brings authenticity, humor and honesty to her educational content—sharing the truths of entrepreneurship, esthetics and everything beauty school never taught. Her voice resonates with both clients and professionals, making her a respected educator in digital spaces.

Carr is also recognized as an AI expert for the beauty industry, helping estheticians integrate technology, automation and AI-driven tools to streamline their businesses, enhance education and expand income opportunities in modern, innovative ways.

Beyond the treatment room, she focuses on guiding estheticians through exit strategies and retirement planning, providing long-term stability and financial literacy to beauty professionals preparing for life beyond the treatment table. Her mission is to elevate the industry by ensuring beauty pros can build legacy, sustainability and generational wealth.

Grounded in faith and fueled by purpose, Carr continues to empower aspiring and established estheticians through continuing education, mentorship, digital learning and community. She believes every beauty professional deserves the clarity, support and strategy to thrive—in the industry and far beyond it.

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THE ART OF THE UPSELL:

How Spa Pros Can Boost Sales Without Feeling Pushy

By Tazeem Jamal

Let's start with a little mindset shift: Upselling isn't about being pushy—it's about being of service. In the spa world, when done with heart and intention, it's one of the most powerful ways to create a more personalized client experience and increase your income without feeling salesy.

As someone who's sold close to $3 million in spa retail, I can confidently say this: clients want your guidance.

They trust you. What they *don't* want is to feel sold to. That's why learning the art of the upsell—done the Purple Carpet way—isn't just good for business, it's transformational for your client relationships too!



Offering complementary services and products that meet their needs can be a great way to approach upseling.

Upselling vs. Over-Selling: Know the Difference

Think of upselling as offering dessert after a beautiful dinner. You're not forcing anything—you're extending a warm invitation to indulge just a little more.

The goal is to enhance the homecare client experience, not to inflate the price tag. When you reframe the upsell as a recommendation or supportive solution rather than a "sales pitch," it softens the whole exchange.

It becomes an extension of your care, not a transaction.

1. Upgrade the Experience, Not Just the Price

Small touches can make a big impact. A $10–$20 add-on can elevate your client's visit in a way that feels luxurious, without pushing them out of their comfort zone financially.

Try this: Suggest a warmed aromatherapy neck wrap during a mask application or a hot stone foot massage at the end of a facial. It feels indulgent, but the cost to you and the client is minimal, and the experience? Elevated.

2. Use the "Finish Strong" Method (But Start Seeding Early)

Here's something most spa pros overlook: if you only talk about products or rebooking in the last five minutes, it will feel like a pitch. That's why we seed early.

Seeding is a soft, conversational way to plant ideas throughout the treatment. It starts during your consultation when you ask thoughtful questions, listen deeply and begin weaving in supportive suggestions based on what you hear.

Example: "Your skin's been feeling dry lately—I'll be using a hydrating mask during your facial. At the end, I'll share a few tips to help you keep that glow going at home."

That tiny seed creates curiosity, not pressure. So when you "finish strong" with a recommendation, it feels natural, and clients know to expect a recommendation.

Try this: "To seal everything in, I'm applying this Vitamin C serum—it's amazing for brightening. You can keep this up between appointments, would you like to take one home?"



From top: Image by unai at Adobe Stock; Image by Veronika Kraevaa/ Adobe Stock

Add-ons can make for an effective upselling tool by educating clients on the advantages of premium services and products.

3. Ask Better Questions That Reveal Opportunities
Consultations aren't just checkboxes—they're opportunities to start deeper conversations and build trust.

Ask things like:
- "What are you currently using at home for hydration?"
- "Is there anything about your skin you'd love to improve or are a concern?"

These questions open the door for tailored recommendations later in the appointment. When clients feel heard, they're more open to trusting your expert guidance.

4. Make It Feel Like a Gift, not a Pitch
One of the best ways to upsell without feeling salesy is to position your offer as something *special*—just for them.



Clockwise from top: Image by unai at Adobe Stock; Image by mitand73 at Adobe Stock; Image by phenphayom at Adobe Stock

Making it feel like a gift isn't just effective for the upsell; it makes the moment feel more luxurious and hosted as well.

Try this: "When you upgrade to our deluxe facial today, I'm gifting you a travel-size enzyme mask to help you maintain your glow at home."

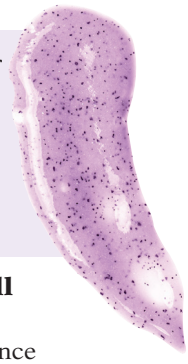
When it feels like a treat, not a transaction, clients are far more likely to say yes.



5. Show, Don't Just Tell
Make your upselling suggestions visual and tangible. Having the product nearby or demonstrating it during the service creates a stronger connection than just talking about it.

Try this: "This is the scrub I used on your arms—feel how smooth it made your skin. You can use it at home once or twice a week."

When clients feel the results firsthand, they're more inclined to want that experience at home too.



6. Rebooking Is the Most Overlooked Upsell
Let's be real—most clients *want* help staying consistent, but they often forget to book in advance unless we invite them to.

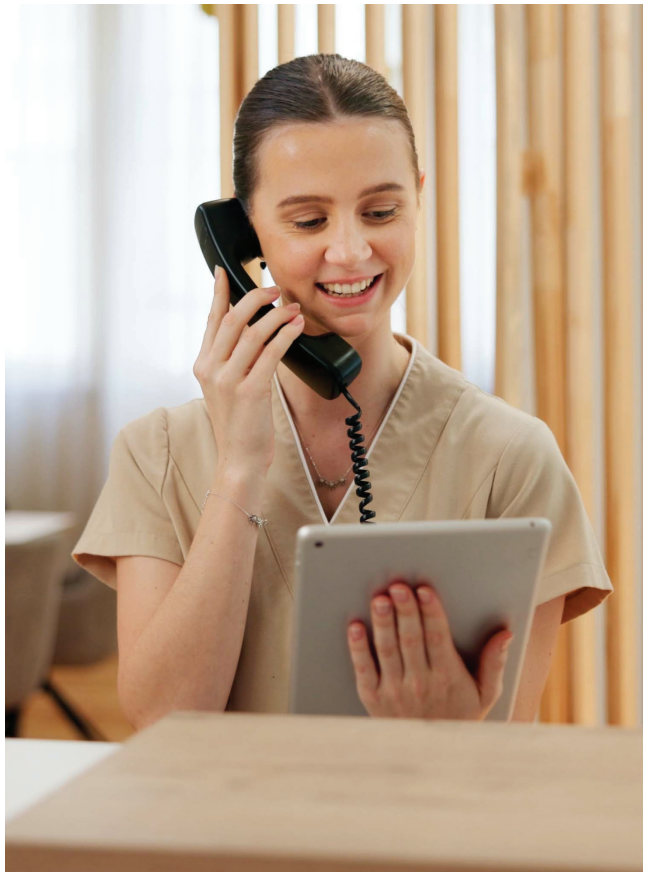
Try this: "Let's book your next visit now—four weeks is the sweet spot to maintain these results and keep your skin on track."

No pressure. Just guidance. And that little nudge makes a big difference in your retention (and revenue)!

7. Use Soulful Language, Not Salesy Phrases
Words matter. Ditch "You should" or "You need to" and swap them for phrases that feel genuine and empowering.

Try these:
- "Based on what I saw today, I'd recommend…"
- "To help you reach your skin goals faster, [product name] might be a great option…"

These tiny tweaks in language build massive trust. They make your client feel like you're walking *with* them, not telling them what to do.



Client transformation stories go a long way, especially in this age of results-focused care.

8. Share Real Client Stories

We're wired to connect through stories. When you share wins from other clients, it creates social proof and builds belief.

Try this:"One of my regulars tried this overnight mask and came back raving about how soft her skin felt!"

You're not bragging—you're showing that others have had results, and that builds trust.

9. Follow Up = Follow Through

The upsell doesn't stop when the client leaves. A quick follow-up shows you care and can prompt another purchase, or booking.

Try this: "Your skin looked amazing yesterday! Would you like me to hold that serum for you?"

Simple. Thoughtful. Effective.

Final Thoughts: It's Not Selling, It's Serving

Upselling done right is never pushy. It's an act of service. It's about guiding your client to better results, offering enhancements that make them feel cared for and elevating their entire experience.

- Start with small, intentional upgrades.
- Lead with your heart. Sell with soul.
- Remember: The Purple Carpet Experience is all about making your clients feel *valued, not sold to*.

SELF REFLECTION QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK YOURSELF

Q: How can I upsell without sounding pushy?
A: Ask discovery questions, offer solutions—not sales—and speak to their goals, not your agenda.

Q: What's a good upsell for a first-time facial client?
A: A trial-size of a product you used or a sensory add-on like a hot towel wrap or eye treatment.

Q: How often should I update my upsell menu?
A: Ideally every season to keep things feeling fresh.

Q: Do clients really want add-ons?
A: 100%! Especially, when they feel personalized and helpful; clients LOVE to feel nurtured.



Tazeem Jamal, LE, (*www.tazeemjamal.com*) is an award-winning spa business coach, spa owner and master esthetician. With over 38 years of industry experience, she now inSPAires spas to scale and grow their businesses using her signature framework, The Purple Carpet Experience, with memberships and masterclasses.

Fondly known as The Retail Sales Catalyst, she is on a mission to help estheticians make more money for every hour they work, by embracing retail sales in their business.

Jamal has been featured on international summits, TV, radio, podcasts and is a regular contributor to multiple industry magazines. Follow her on her YouTube channel where she shares tips& insights.

Earlier this year she published her book *The Spa Diaries, InSPArational Stories of Spa & Beauty Professionals*, which is available on Amazon.

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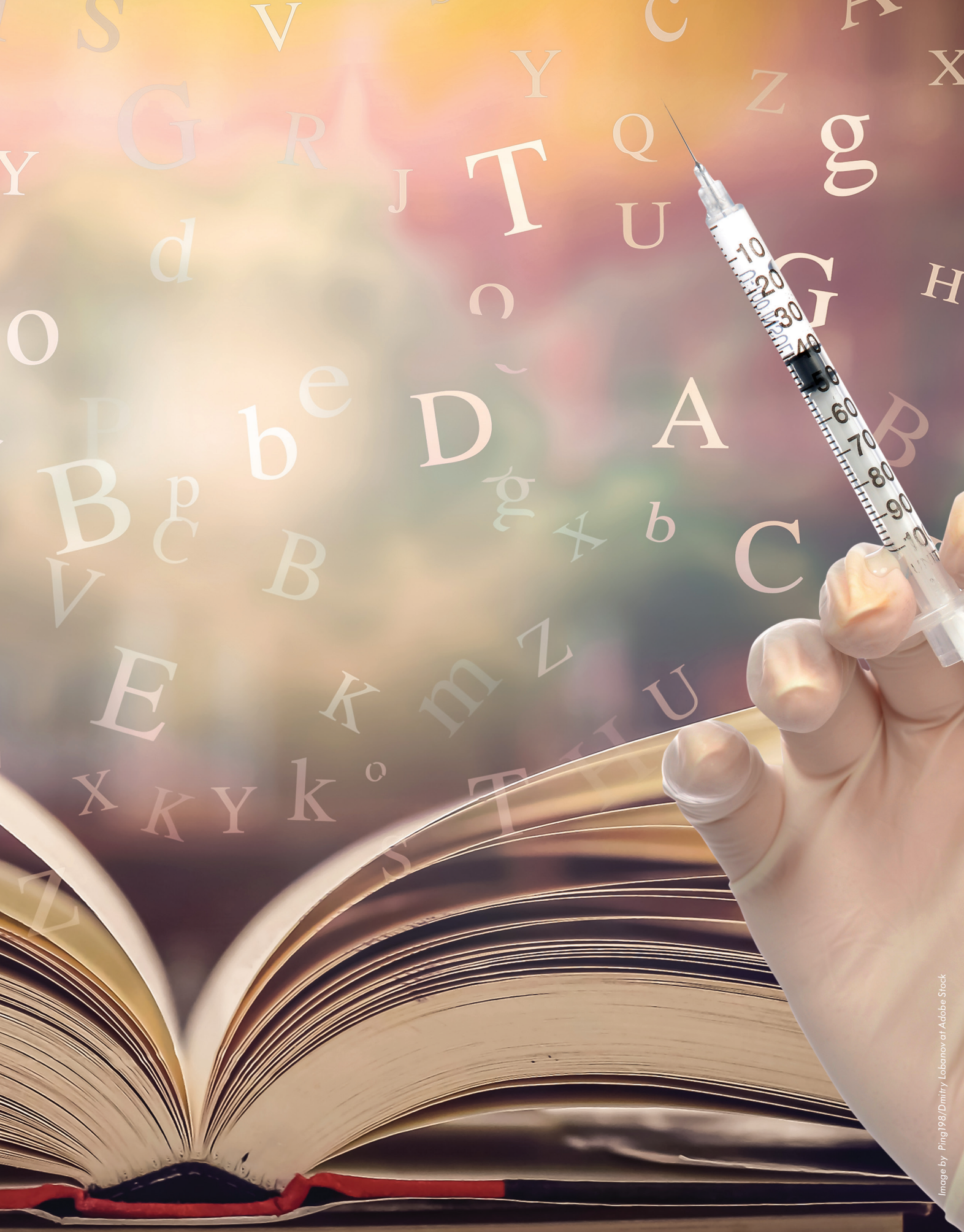

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CLOSING THE TRAINING GAP IN AESTHETIC MEDICINE:

Why Structure and Practicality Must Go Hand in Hand

By Pyn Lim

Aesthetic medicine has become one of the fastest-growing sectors in health and wellness. Procedures that once belonged exclusively to dermatologists and surgeons now take place daily in medspas and wellness clinics across the world.

For spa and skin professionals who work alongside physicians or refer clients for aesthetic treatments, this growth presents both opportunity and obligation. Clients may see only a needle, a vial and a promise of quick results. However, those who work in the field know that behind every safe and beautiful outcome lies something invisible yet decisive—the quality, structure and practicality of the training that shaped the practitioner's skill and judgment.



A major contributor to the educational gap is a lack of robust systemic support.

The Global Education Gap

Unlike traditional medical specialties, aesthetic medicine has evolved faster than its regulatory and educational systems. There is still no universal residency or standardized training pathway. Many practitioners begin offering injections after attending a brief weekend course or a manufacturer's "masterclass."

A 2023 review in *Dermatologic Surgery* highlighted this inconsistency, finding wide variations in the length, supervision and curriculum of aesthetic-injection education worldwide. The result is an uneven professional landscape: one practitioner may have dissected facial anatomy in a lab; another may have learned technique from a KOL doctor or nurse trainer at a hotel workshop.

For spa professionals and clinic managers, that difference matters. When your client's safety depends on a procedure performed under your clinic's name, the credentials behind that syringe become your concern too.

When Training Shortcuts Create Risk

Recent data highlights what happens when structure is missing. A 2024 systematic review in the *Aesthetic Surgery Journal* estimated that roughly one in three patients undergoing nonsurgical facial procedures experienced at least one treatment-related adverse event. Most were minor, but serious complications—vascular occlusion, blindness or infection—were strongly associated with insufficient understanding of anatomy and emergency management.

The U.K.'s Joint Council for Cosmetic Practitioners reported similar findings: about 70% of investigated complications involved clinicians who had completed brief or unaccredited training courses. Many of these programs were designed or sponsored by manufacturers whose primary aim was to promote product use, not to cultivate deep clinical reasoning.

The lesson is simple. Education that prioritizes marketing over medicine compromises safety. Since spa professionals often operate in partnership with these providers, weak training upstream can jeopardize reputation and client trust downstream.

The Patchwork Reality in the United States

In the U.S., aesthetic injection regulations are determined at the state level, resulting in a patchwork of rules and interpretations. Some states limit injections to physicians; others allow nurse practitioners (NPs), physician assistants (PAs) or registered nurses (RNs) to inject under supervision.



Top: Image by Irina Flamingo at Adobe Stock; Bottom: Image by ActionGR at Adobe Stock

This patchwork means that the same procedure can occur under entirely different safety conditions depending on geography. In some clinics, the supervising physician may be hundreds of miles away—legally listed, rarely present and sometimes untrained in aesthetic complications.

If an adverse event occurs, their name appears on the paperwork, but they are nowhere near the patient who needs help.

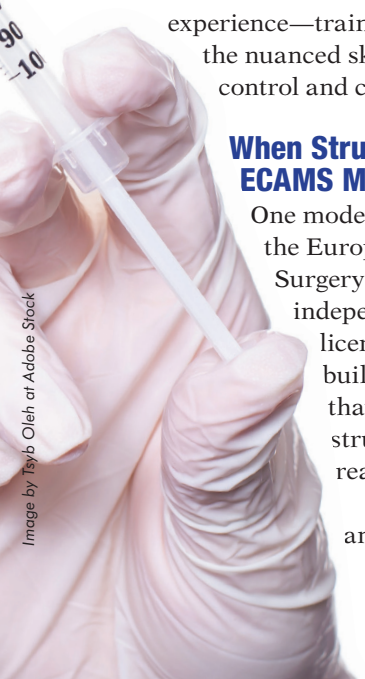
The most effective safety net is not regulation alone, but a doctor who is both educated and present—ready to act the moment something goes wrong.

Redefining What "Qualified" Really Means

In aesthetic medicine, the word *qualified* should not simply refer to holding a medical license. Real qualification combines structured education, progressive skill development and hands on practice under expert supervision.

Academic institutions, including universities, have begun offering postgraduate programs in aesthetics, which helps introduce structure. However, many remain largely theoretical, emphasizing research and policy over practical, day-to-day technique. Professors may excel in science and ethics but lack recent procedural experience. That academic-practice divide can leave graduates well-versed in literature yet underprepared for the realities of patient care.

Elective aesthetic patients are not seeking basic outcomes; they expect precision, artistry and minimal risk. Meeting those expectations requires educators and institutions that merge academic rigor with real-world experience—training that balances knowledge with the nuanced skill of patient evaluation, injection control and complication management.



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When Structure Meets Practice: The ECAMS Model

One model that integrates these principles is the European College of Aesthetic Medicine& Surgery (ECAMS). Established to provide independent education exclusively for licensed doctors and surgeons, ECAMS built its curriculum on the belief that patient safety begins with both structured knowledge and direct, real-world practice.

Its programs progress from anatomical and scientific foundations to advanced surgical and regenerative techniques, ensuring that participants move through a logical sequence — study, observe, practice and master. Crucially, these programs are conducted in person and hands-on, not online, with close faculty supervision and live anatomical or cadaveric application.



True qualification comes down to a solid and standardized formal education.

Another defining feature is ECAMS' focus on complication management. Every course emphasizes prevention, recognition and immediate intervention for complications such as vascular occlusion, tissue necrosis or infection. This practical emphasis distinguishes structured education from symbolic gestures, such as online certificates or membership in "safety societies."

Being a member of a safety organization or attending virtual lectures may demonstrate interest, but it does not equate to the competence that comes from real, guided training. In aesthetics, reading about an emergency is not the same as managing one at the table.

For spa professionals seeking medical partners or evaluating potential medical directors, this distinction is vital. Ask not just whether a doctor is certified or affiliated with a society, but whether they have completed in-person, hands-on complication management training under expert supervision. That question alone can separate marketing claims from medical capability.



A robust foundational training and thorough, intentional mentorship play major roles in making the aesthetics industry safer and more reliable.

Supervision and Training Must Align

Across many U.S. states, nurse injectors and physician assistants work under a physician's delegation. Yet, if that physician has never been trained in aesthetic procedures or complication management, the chain of safety breaks before treatment even begins.

The gold standard is simple: every supervising physician should be trained to the same or higher level of practical proficiency as the injectors they oversee—especially in handling emergencies. They should be physically present or immediately reachable, maintain reversal agents on site and conduct regular team drills to reinforce emergency response.

Spa professionals can advocate for these standards by incorporating specific questions into their partnerships:

- Has the physician completed formal, structured and hands-on training in complication management?
- Are educational credentials independently verified and not limited to online modules?
- Is the doctor routinely present in the clinic and actively supervising procedures?
- Does the facility have written emergency protocols and necessary medications on hand?

A "yes" to these questions signals a clinic built on safety, not convenience.

A Shared Commitment to Safer Practice

For many readers of *Skin Inc.*, direct injection or prescription may not fall within your license, but you are still part of the safety chain. Clients trust you for advice, for referrals and often for reassurance when something looks wrong.

Understanding how your collaborating medical team is trained and demanding that training be structured, progressive and practical protects your clients and your reputation alike. It also helps elevate aesthetics from a fragmented industry to a credible medical discipline.

Programs that combine structured learning, independent oversight and genuine hands-on practice—as exemplified by ECAMS—show what the next generation of education can achieve. They bridge the gap between theory and reality, ensuring that doctors and surgeons not only know the science but can apply it safely and confidently in practice.

Conclusion

Aesthetic medicine exists at the intersection of art and science, but it must operate under the discipline of medicine. Structure without practice breeds theory; practice without structure breeds risk. The future belongs to those who balance both—doctors who train rigorously, supervise responsibly and respond in a timely fashion when complications occur.

In a field where every patient is elective, safety isn't optional—it's the standard.



Pyn Lim is the founder and chief director of the European College of Aesthetic Medicine& Surgery (ECAMS), established in 2008. Recognized internationally as the leading authority in aesthetic medicine and surgery education, ECAMS is ISO 29995:2021, ISO 29994:2021 and ISO 29993:2017 certified. With eight specialized departments and six fellowship programs, ECAMS sets the global benchmark for structured, hands-on, anatomy-based training and patient safety–driven education for doctors and surgeons worldwide.

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Hemp

by Kitty Lin

Hemp is a popular ingredient choice for those looking for "natural" or "clean" beauty, appealing to the eco-conscious consumer who may want to avoid synthetics. Growing consumer awareness has led to the mass search for gentle, transparent ingredients that don't hide anything in a sea of befuddling consonants like your -parabens,-eths, -siloxanes and what have you.

"Hemp-derived ingredients have become especially appealing to today's consumer because they align with the 'natural, functional' expectation—people want products that feel clean and plant-based, but still deliver visible results," explains Tammy Pahel, VP of spa& wellness operations at Carillon Miami Wellness Resort. "In spa, we see hemp positioned most successfully when it's paired with clear benefits like soothing stressed skin and supporting a healthy-looking barrier."

It isn't just a matter of ease and trust though; hemp is actually widely revered in skin care for its moisturizing properties, as well as its anti-inflammatory and longevity benefits.

"Hemp-derived ingredients give skin a rare one-two punch: the oil is rich in balanced essential fatty acids that help rebuild a healthy barrier, while the plant's natural compounds can calm inflammation and reduce oxidative stress," says Rebecca Gadberry, LE, FSCC and director of product development& education, YG Labs. "This combination helps skin stay better hydrated, less reactive and more resilient over time."

Hemp and omega-6

The core of hemp's benefits lie in its barrier-loving fatty acids, particularly omega-6, that help fortify the foundation for healthy skin.

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Gadberry adds: "Omega-6 itself is not rare in the plant world, but hemp is unusually rich in the omega-6 form linoleic acid and related fats in a ratio that closely matches what skin needs for a healthy barrier. Many seed oils contain omega-6, yet hemp seed oil stands out because it combines high linoleic acid with a favorable balance of omega-3 and small amounts of gamma-linolenic acid, which together support barrier repair and help calm inflammation."

Who benefits from hemp?

Winter is a great opportunity to put hemp to use.

"Dry indoor heating, cold wind and reduced humidity compromise the barrier. Hemp's essential fatty acids (omega-3 and omega-6), paired with its calming properties, help relieve flaking, tightness and redness.," comments Nansy Mui, founder of Barefoot Sunday. "It's a great 'reset' after harsher weather exposure."

Even outside of the cold, harsh months, hemp is an ingredient worth keeping an eye on.

"On skin, omega-6/linoleic acid is especially helpful for dry, barrier-damaged, sensitive or eczema-prone skin, where it restores lipids, reduces transepidermal water loss and soothes redness," adds Gadberry. "It is also well suited to oily and acne-prone skin, because linoleic acid is lightweight, supports ceramide production, and has been associated with fewer clogged pores and better barrier function in acne-prone populations."



Hemp can look appealing on labels to those who are looking for "natural" ingredients.



Hemp is also sought after for its anti-inflammatory and pain-relieving qualities, especially for issues like eczema or psoriasis.

Mui advises: "While acne clients often fear moisturizers, hemp-based CBD is a smart, non-comedogenic middle ground. It helps reduce inflammation surrounding active breakouts, regulate sebum and oil production, support healing without clogging pores and prevent rebound oiliness from over-drying."

For estheticians, Mui says that adding a hemp-based moisturizer can reduce post-extraction irritation and support clearer, calmer skin over time.

Julie Williams, founder and medical herbalist at Leaf People, goes on to say, "Products utilizing hemp oil provide essential fatty acids that deeply hydrate and help balance surface oils without clogging pores, along with vitamin E and naturally occurring minerals that replenish and support a stronger, more radiant-looking skin barrier. With its inherent calming and sebum-balancing properties, hemp oil is an excellent choice for clients with dry or combination skin types, any type of visible redness or mild skin irritations."

It's not just about what you use in the treatment room or what you retail either.

Pahel notes: "One of the biggest opportunities with hemp is consumer education. 'Hemp' can mean different things on a label—hemp seed oil versus CBD, for example—so it's important that brands set realistic expectations and clearly communicate sourcing and intended benefits."

Kitty Lin is the managing editor of *Skin Inc.*

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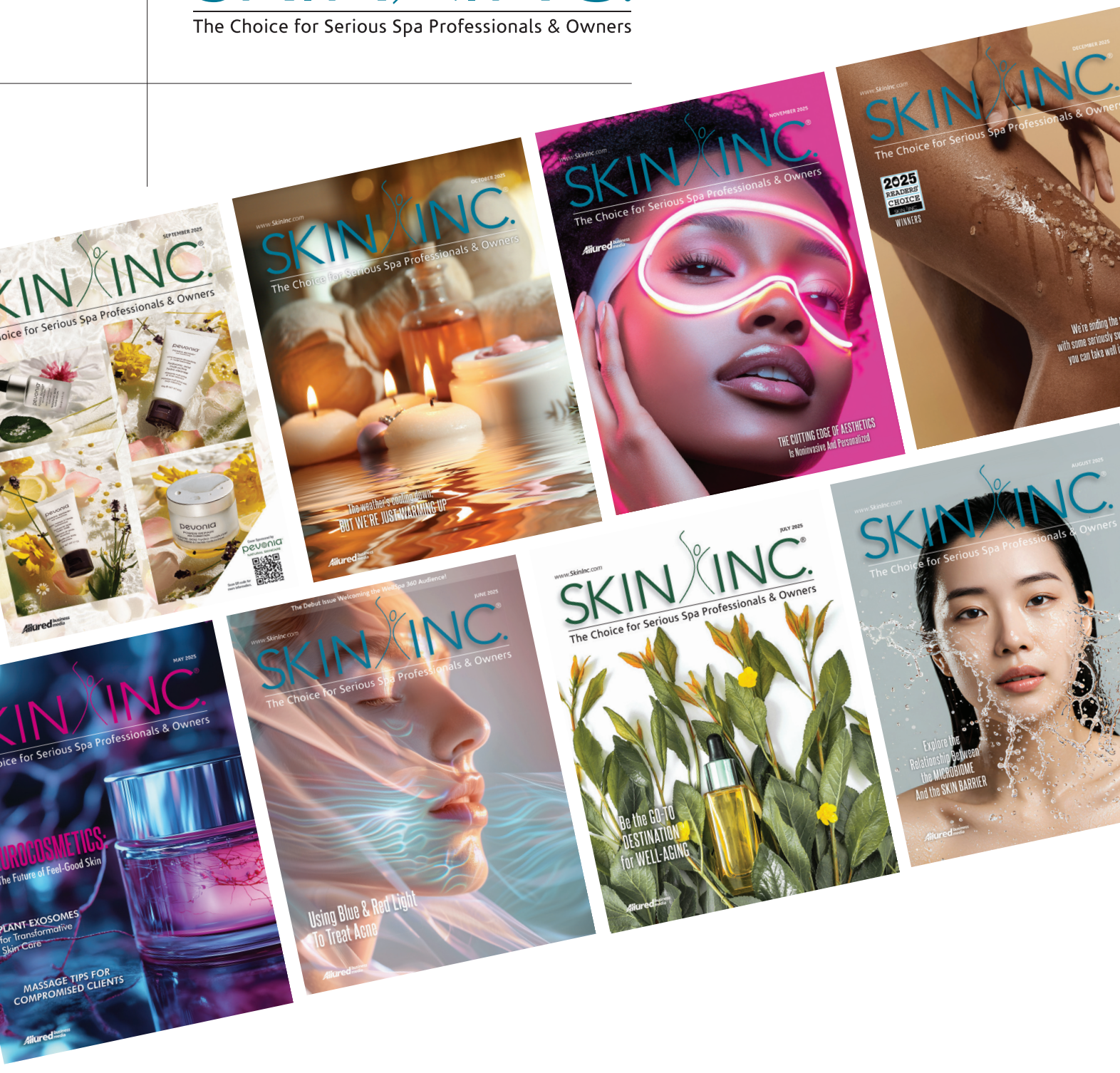

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