

# The truth about beauty

*The practices of medico beauty therapists have been under the media spotlight of late. So what separates genuine practitioners – those you can trust with your looks – from the rest? **Charlotte Collins** investigates.*

**C**hannel 4's recent series, *The Ugly Face of Beauty*, was something of a horror show. It featured the traumatic experiences of a number of men and women who, believing themselves to be in the hands of those who knew what they were doing, have emerged from a variety of beauty treatments with their appearances not enhanced but ruined. Lips made bulbous; expressions fixed as if set in cement; their skin in a state of eruption; the balance of their faces misaligned and distorted.

A major article in *The Observer* went on to reinforce the point: sign up to a medico beauty treatment course without a full and complete knowledge of the skill and expertise of the people involved and you run the risk of cosmetic catastrophe.

Disturbing and important though the findings of both the programme and the article were, they did not alter two fundamental points. That there are increasing numbers of men and women who wish to take advantage of real scientific advances in medico beauty treatments in order to rejuvenate their looks; and that those scientific advances, when correctly and properly applied, can make a lasting difference to every aspect of facial aesthetics from skin tone to muscle contours.

So: how to separate the wheat from the chaff, the professionals from the amateurs (and the charlatans)? I went along to the MBNS clinic in Thame for a guide. Such is the reputation that MBNS has won over the years for the rigour of its insistence on excellence of training and on depth of knowledge that medico beauty practitioners from all over the UK are regularly sent to the clinic to shadow the team at work.



“When it comes to finding a good medico beauty treatment clinic the right sort of research is key,” explains Marea Brennan-Thorns, one of the founders of MBNS and a highly respected aesthetic nurse. “By the right sort of research I don’t mean trawling the internet and the blogosphere for any and every opinion on any and every treatment. I mean interrogating beauty practitioners and clinics before you so much as agree to any course or hand over a penny of your money.”

And what questions should form part of that interrogation? Marea offers an exhaustive list.

“Ask about their length of experience and how many years have they been practising. That’s a real test of their success. Poor practitioners tend to get weeded out quite quickly,” she says. “Then ask if you can talk to their existing clients. There is no better testament to a

good clinician than a number of clients – don’t be beguiled by just a single reference – who are happy and willing to chat about the outcome of their treatments with you. Every reputable clinic will have a gallery of their own ‘before and after photographs’ too. What could be simpler than offering you a viewing? Insist on it.

“Beware of ‘free’ offers. If you are signing up to a professional clinic, you must expect a consultancy fee. You are, after all, paying for years of training, and genuine knowledge comes at a cost. Should someone promise you a free consultation or a discount on certain treatments – botox and wrinkle relaxation is a favourite ‘come on’ – head for the door.

“On the subject of training and qualifications, request evidence. What and when and by whose authority. But there are issues in addition to clinical



expertise and medical training. All good practitioners should have an aesthetic eye, by which I mean an instinctive feeling for those subtle qualities of shape of face, of disposition of features, of texture of skin, of colour and shade, of proportion and symmetry, and of the character and personality of expression.

“Take a good look around at the physical environment of the clinic itself. Is it fit for purpose? Is it a place that helps you to feel comfortable and does it inspire confidence in the people charged with running and managing it? Here at MBNS we are regulated by the Care Quality Commission. All laser clinics should be.

“Put up an antenna for any undue sales pressure. Query whether you really need every treatment you are being recommended. Is it your interests or those of the clinic that are at stake? The code of nursing practice that hangs from the walls of MBNS makes it clear that a nurse must not offer a treatment that she is uncomfortable with.

“Beware over-promises too. An important part of the consultations we conduct at MBNS is to manage client expectations. Of course, we can work wonders. But, just sometimes, someone arrives with ambitions that are beyond

the bounds of what is achievable. It would be wholly dishonest on our part to nod and say ‘not a problem’ and to raise hopes to a level where disappointment is the only likely result; and wholly unfair to the client. If there is a particularly intractable problem, we will refer the client to a surgeon, someone with the means to resolve deep, underlying medical issues.

“I appreciate that money is important to people, especially now. But I really would advise against being ‘price driven’. Professional clinics charge what they do for the skill and talents of their staff. Remember that what is on the line is something that is both as intimate and as public as the way you look. Don’t compromise on something so integral to your self-esteem on the basis of the cost.

“Finally, scan the shelves. Does the clinic have specialist skin products on sale? It may seem a relatively unimportant point but it is a measure of the clinic’s standing within the beauty treatment world. Here at MBNS we are able to stock strong skin products – these would need nurse supervision and are much more effective than remedies on sale in the High Street – at prices that are barely, if at all, above High Street levels for those other, less proficient items.”

A proportion of the work carried out at MBNS is dedicated to remedying the wrongs of the unqualified, the inexperienced, the chancers. “Many of these people, the ones who pop into hairdressers as part-time ‘beauty consultants’, lack any qualification and leave their clients without any follow-up treatments,” says Stephanie Green co-founder of MBNS and another aesthetic nurse with years of know-how behind her. “We are forever having to pick up the pieces of their ineptitude. It is a real concern to all the nurses here. For that reason, I am glad that the media have been highlighting the risks of unmonitored treatments. Hopefully it means that more men and women – men and women who only want to look younger and healthier in a way that is natural to the rhythm of their bodies – will be more aware of those who choose to exploit their quite understandable desires. And more aware of those who, experts in their field, offer tried, tested and lasting treatments and who can fulfil those same desires.”

Beauty, it seems, lies in knowledge.

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