

Business Trend: The Acupuncturist-Esthetician Practice

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There is a rapidly growing trend among American acupuncturists of offering various forms of facial rejuvenation as a service in their practices. This is in response to a massive demand for anti-aging, rejuvenation services from the baby boomer generation, which spends billions of dollars each year (and growing) in pursuit of looking and feeling younger.

As acupuncturists, we have a unique and very favorable scope of practice that allows us to offer and advertise both energetic health care and esthetic rejuvenation services within the same practice. With the possible exception of naturopaths in a few states, I am not aware of any other profession whose licensure supports this. This article is about the trend within the trend - the growing number of acupuncturists who have been hiring licensed estheticians to work for them to perform facials, thus significantly boosting their income and referral base. Before describing this new business model, I will first present some background information.

The ability of acupuncturists to offer both Oriental medicine and facial rejuvenation can be of great benefit to our clients. This is supported by the holographic connections between the face and body viscera - the "as above, so below" principle. The science of holography reveals that small parts of a system often contain "maps" or correspondences that allow them to influence the whole system. Acupuncture microsystems such as auricular therapy, Korean hand therapy or *hara* diagnosis are examples of this. Perhaps less commonly acknowledged is the fact that the face is a major holographic microsystem as well, containing zones corresponding to all the major organs and chakras. Applying appropriate, gentle levels of stimulation to these facial zones has the documented ability to favorably affect the corresponding internal body organs and systems.¹

"As above, so below" is a two-way street. Just as facial acupoint stimulation can help energize or balance viscera through meridian connections, so can body acupuncture and internal herbal medicine promote anti-aging enhancements on the face. This is an important area in which acupuncturists have an advantage over estheticians, who lack both the training and scope of practice to diagnose and treat health disorders of the body. They are limited to performing mostly superficial applications to the skin surface. Even MDs who run plastic surgery centers or work with estheticians in medi-spas mainly deal in invasive rejuvenation procedures that carry many risks of adverse reactions. These include surgery, injectable fillers, Botox, intense pulsed light (IPL) and harsh chemical peels.

Such collaborations between acupuncturists and estheticians have created a large stream of additional income for the acupuncturist, who no longer performs all the facial sessions themselves, but continues to significantly profit from the differential between the fee paid by the client and what was paid to the esthetician. This collaboration also has helped create more marketing sizzle for the acupuncturist. Many of the clients who initially came in for facials, eventually booked sessions for acupuncture to

address their health imbalances. This also created a good-paying job for an esthetician, along with an opportunity for the more holistic-minded ones to be part of a business that might be of more long-term interest to them than working in a conventional spa setting.

And finally, the acupuncturist-esthetician practice provides a superior service for clients. They are able to receive the benefits of "as above, so below" from both ends - quality facials, as well as supportive health care in the form of acupuncture, herbal medicine or other nutritional or lifestyle support. This fulfills what so many baby boomer clients are eagerly looking for.

As an example of the value of Chinese medicine combined with esthetics, I was speaking today to one of my acupuncturist students just beginning to offer facials in her practice. She told me that out of the first 12 women she had been giving facials to, 11 of them were reporting favorable, satisfactory results and one overweight woman was not responding well. Although that woman was not having a favorable response to the facial, she had lost some weight in the course of treatment! I suggested this practitioner evaluate the patient to see if she had a damp Spleen condition. This may have been causing prolapse of her basal dermal tissues, thereby preventing response to the lifting effects of the microcurrent and color-light ELR treatments. If so, I asked her to consider giving a spleen tonic and dampness-dispelling herbal formula and/or body acupuncture and moxibustion to help this patient on a constitutional level. This eventually could support her in having a more positive response to the facials.

There are many services acupuncturists can offer to support and enhance the effectiveness of facial rejuvenation. These include needling or moxing constitutional or grounding acupoints during the facial session, constitutional herbal support, facial acupressure, sacral treatment (a corresponding "as above, so below" region to the face), microcurrent and color-light *mu shu* organ treatments, and PNE balancing.²

While it might be permissible for an acupuncturist to hire an unlicensed assistant to perform facial rejuvenation under their supervision, this often gets into a legal "gray area" or might be prohibited in some states. Using an unlicensed operator also might void malpractice coverage. It's far safer from a regulatory viewpoint to hire or contract with someone clearly licensed in your state to offer esthetic facial services. While estheticians clearly cannot perform acupuncture needle facials, they are licensed to operate electrical stimulation devices for facial rejuvenation.

Many acupuncturists are discovering what so many other doctors have known for a long time - that their practice and income can be significantly expanded by strategically hiring associates to offer additional services within their practice. Non-needle facial rejuvenation is likely to be one of the most popular and profitable such services to integrate into the acupuncture practice. Uplifting the quality of whole-person care that rejuvenation clients receive is a valuable service that acupuncturists can offer.

References

1. For more details about this phenomenon, please see my article, "Facial Rejuvenation - Good Medicine," which is archived on my columnist page at www.acupuncturetoday.com/columnists/starwynn.
2. PNE = Psycho-neuro-endocrine balancing, a form of chakra balancing using color light and intentional statements. Further details on this and *mu shu* treatment also can be found in my article archives at www.acupuncturetoday.com.

