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filling a void

Dennis Gross, M.D., talks about the benefits of the injectable filler Sculptra.

Sculptra, the new kid on the block of injectable fillers, is literally filling a void left behind by others. Composed of poly-L-lactic acid, Sculptra actually spurs the skin's fibroblast cells to synthesize collagen. Manufactured in Europe, it has been used there successfully since 1999. In 2004, it was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the restoration or correction of facial fat loss (lipatrophy) in patients with HIV. Because of its composition, Sculptra is actually an excellent choice for any patient who wants to fill deep skin defects. Although using Sculptra for cosmetic purposes is technically considered "off-label" by the FDA, many of us in the medical industry are hoping to see this change in the near future.

HOW IT WORKS

A series of two to three injections performed monthly is recommended to get the desired full correction. The results are achieved gradually and often no improvement is seen after the first session. Only licensed physicians are permitted by law to administer Sculptra. However, dermatologists with definitive training are recommended for best results. This is true because the skin is literally being sculpted, and the results can last for years.

The Sculptra procedure, which only requires local anesthesia, is easy and rather painless from the patient's point of view. As with all injectable fillers, *continued on page 74*

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bruising is the only side effect and may last for a few days. This can be minimized if the patient discontinues taking any aspirin-related products and vitamin E for a week before the procedure. Having done many cases in my office, I am also particularly strict in requiring that patients massage the treated area for 10 minutes twice daily for a week to further ensure a smooth correction and contour to the treated area.

WHY IT'S DIFFERENT

As opposed to other injectable fillers, Sculptra actually promotes the production of collagen in the skin at the site of injection. While the effects of other fillers last about six months at most, Sculptra's

effect persists for approximately two years. Also, unlike other fillers, Sculptra is not used for the correction of superficial wrinkles or fine lines. Instead, it is reserved for adding significant volume to facial areas that show major hollowing or are in need of significant enhancement. Sculptra is usually injected into the temples and cheeks to fill sunken areas due to weight loss or post-menopausal hormonal changes or to enhance the cheekbones or eye area, which diminish with age. Deep grooves and laxity in the nasal labial folds or perioral areas may also be restored. Besides correcting routine aging issues, Sculptra may also benefit individuals with genetic facial asymmetry.

By correcting deeper facial defects, Sculptra adds a new dimension to beauty procedures. As opposed to replacing many anti-aging treatments, it actually complements them. For spas considering adding Sculptra procedures to their service menus, however, caution must be exercised. Sculptra requires greater skill to administer than other fillers because its final corrective results are not witnessed for several weeks and gauging exactly how much and where to inject it can be tricky. Furthermore, imperfect results could last for more than a year. Nonetheless, these concerns will diminish with time and experience. The medical spa industry should keep a watchful and enthusiastic eye on this filler, especially if it gets broader FDA approval, which would formally allow it to be used in non-HIV individuals.—Dennis Gross, M.D.

Dennis Gross, M.D., is a Manhattan-based dermatologist, creator of MD Skincare, and author of *Your Future Face* (Viking Penguin, 2005). He received his medical degree from New York University Medical Center and began his career as a skin cancer research scientist. Gross is a fellow and active member of the American Academy of Dermatology, New York Dermatological Society, the Society for Dermatological Surgery and Oncology, and The American Cancer Society. He is currently affiliated with NYU Medical Center. For information on MD Skincare products, call (888) 830-SKIN or visit www.mdskincare.com. For more information on his book, visit www.yourfutureface.com.

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