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Contemporary OB/GYN

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Integrating Aesthetic Services INTO THE Ob/Gyn Practice



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The use of radiofrequency or laser energy-based devices is becoming increasingly common in Ob/Gyn practices for a variety of FDA-cleared indications. Some practices, however, are expanding their use of these energy-based devices and providing aesthetic services to their patients as a part of a holistic approach in patient care.

In this supplement, our physician experts talk about how their practices have evolved through the introduction of energy-based devices and why they continue to expand the services they provide.

Contemporary OB/GYN: How would you describe the makeup of your current practice? How has it evolved over the years?

Anne Lord-Tomas, DO, FACOOG: I'm currently owner of a private practice and surgical center along with my husband. Although I am Ob/Gyn certified, I do not practice obstetrics anymore, which seems to be a growing trend for many of us who trained in this specialty. My current practice is a direct patient care model—we are not insurance-based. It's a much more peaceful, low stress, highly educational way to practice, and we have had success with this business model.

Nancy Carlson, MD, FACOOG: I started my privately-owned gynecology practice in 2003. My gynecology services are insurance-based, and I provide comprehensive women's health care and outpatient surgery. I began adding medical aesthetic services to my practice in 2004, and my business has evolved into a combination of insurance-based and cash-based services.

Contemporary OB/GYN: When did you initially start exploring the introduction of energy-based aesthetic devices into your practice? What initially drove that decision?

Dr. Lord-Tomas: We started looking into our initial energy-based device about 7 or 8 years ago as we moved into integrating a med-spa to complement our specialty practice.

It took a bit of time to get a good feel for what technologies we would need. It's almost like going to the convenience store to buy a health supplement. There are 50,000 different items on the shelf to choose from, and they all could be good for me, but it's very confusing and overwhelming to figure out which ones are going to be best. Similarly, when a practitioner is looking into adding a med spa or just broadening their array of services, the options can be overwhelming.

I started by talking to colleagues I knew who had already made the investment in these technologies and observed that they spent time and money training their staff. I started going to different conferences beyond those focused on Ob/Gyn clinical topics—for instance, ones that focused on wellness practices, age management, and cosmetology. Going to those types of conferences allows you not only to think more about what services you may want to integrate but it also allows you to get hands-on exposure to technologies from companies that may not necessarily exhibit at traditional medical conferences. I also did a lot of due diligence in researching which companies seemed to have the soundest foundations, reputation, and stability.

I have been fortunate enough to forge a relationship with the team at Candela as manufacturer of a lot of the technology I've acquired. They have been extremely diligent and patient

PANELISTS



ANNE LORD-TOMAS, DO, FACOOG, is a partner and cofounder of U First Health & Rejuvenation in Fort Myers, FL. She received her medical degree as a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine from Nova Southeastern University and completed a medical internship and residency in Ob/Gyn at Michigan State University. Dr. Anne is Board Certified in her specialty, and also offers services in Cosmetogynecology, energy-based devices, hormonal restoration and a passion for women's & couple's wellness.



NANCY CARLSON, MD, FACOOG, is a board-certified Ob/Gyn and owner of Lumina Med Spa in South Burlington, VT, and Estero, FL. She earned her MD at SUNY Upstate in Syracuse, New York, and completed her residency training at what is now UVM Medical Center in Burlington, Vermont. Dr. Carlson added aesthetic services to her private practice of gynecology in 2004. Both aspects of her practice continue to grow and offer the most current options for women in healthcare and aesthetics.

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with training of everyone on my team, and their representatives have made themselves available to answer any questions we have had. Because of the growth of the aesthetic industry in Ob/Gyn circles, the Candela team has been able to hone their expertise in the field and are able to provide us with better feedback and more in-depth training about the potential use of their technologies.

Dr. Carlson: While attending a national meeting of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists meeting in 2004, I met a female physician from New York City who had recently purchased a 1064-nm long-pulsed neodymium-YAG laser for hair removal services in her practice. She encouraged me to explore acquiring a laser for my practice. That's when I started to consider broadening services for my patients and to incorporate some of these technologies into my practice. I followed her suggestion and attended seminars offered by the manufacturer of her laser. I initiated laser-based services with this company, but have since expanded my equipment and now primarily use Candela technology. I was named a Candela Center of Excellence in October 2018, the third location in the United States to earn this designation.

Contemporary OB/GYN: How did you determine that your gynecology patients would be interested in aesthetic services that utilize laser technology?

Dr. Carlson: My main practice is located in Vermont, and when I started looking into the acquisition of a laser in 2004, laser hair removal had already become popular among women living in metropolitan areas such as New York and Boston. In my community, there were two providers offering that service, both men. I just took a leap of faith and believed that aesthetic services offered by a female physician would be in demand. I didn't do any formal surveying of my patients, but I knew through conversations with them that a lot of them were complaining of issues that I would be able to treat with the laser, specifically hair and spider vein removal. It was immediately popular. I almost couldn't keep up with the initial demand.

Contemporary OB/GYN: When you first started providing aesthetic services, how did you build awareness within your practice and the broader community?

Dr. Lord-Tomas: That's a key question because it is not something that comes naturally for a lot of us. The first thing is that you need to be passionate about the technology and truly believe in its ability to change lives. If you are going to be wishy-washy about it, it will be much harder to talk convincingly about the benefits with your patients. Once we found a technology we believed in, our first step was to create a short survey for our current patients. Many companies will help you with that to make sure you are asking the right questions and getting the information you need. So, whenever patients came in for their gynecology exam and were filling out an initial intake form or sitting in the waiting room, we asked them to

complete this survey to gauge whether they would be interested in our practice's new services. This not only built awareness but it also identified those specific patients who would be viable candidates for follow-up.

In my opinion, starting with your in-house patient population is the smartest way to begin because these are people who are already confident in you. You are already taking care of them. Another important step is to use your staff as early beneficiaries of the technology. Not only can these free cosmetic procedures be a fringe benefit of their employment but they will also be able to serve as ambassadors to your patients, telling them, "Hey, I already did this, the results were great, and the recovery was simple." Again, your patients know and trust your staff, so getting them excited about new technologies can provide an initial boost. None of these efforts cost much, if anything.

When the time comes to try to market your services outside of your current patient population, that's when you have to do some research into your potential demographic and decide how aggressive you want to be. We have run some newspaper advertisements, renovated our web site, and done some commercials on the Latin Network because of the large Latino population near my practice. Something else that I found helpful was going around to other local physician practices and offering free educational seminars. We even had a couple of seminars at our office after normal working hours, and we served hors d'oeuvres. Doctors, their staff, and motivated patients love to be educated. These seminars have provided a great return on investment for our practice through direct referrals.

Dr. Carlson: Physicians typically feel uncomfortable advertising themselves, which is slowly changing, but at the time I acquired my first laser and began offering more aesthetic services, I was cautious about being too visible to the general public. I relied instead on subtle techniques like brochures in the waiting room, along with a few open houses and educational seminars, but the growth was really driven by word of mouth. That may not have worked in a larger metropolitan area, but because my main practice is located in a smaller geographic area, I was able to rely on my current gynecology patients to spread the word. I also surveyed the initial patients who came to my practice for aesthetic laser services to find out how they heard about it. The majority of them came via referral from a friend or other physician.

Contemporary OB/GYN: How has the use of laser technologies in your practice evolved over time?

Dr. Carlson: It has been a slow build. I didn't rush out and spend a lot of money on new equipment all at once. Many gynecology patients have asked me to add specific services over the years with questions such as "Can you remove this brown spot?" or "Can you take care of my large pores?" So, I have listened to their requests, considered the overall need, and then added technologies and services accordingly. What has perhaps been a little unique in my practice is that initially

I was personally the one who provided all new services. I think that helped build trust, because it was frequently my regular gynecology patients who were coming in for these additional procedures and they could see that I believed in these services. I think that legitimized services more than if I had delegated these procedures to other staff from the beginning.

What also helped is that the initial platform I selected was a versatile laser system to which I could add different forms of energy therefore expanding my services.¹ Consequently, it didn't require a purchase of additional equipment every time I wanted to introduce a new service to my patients. As demand for some of these procedures grew and I added additional services, I was able to hire and train staff to ease the demand and allow me to continue to see and treat my gynecology patients.

Currently, in addition to a team of fulltime aestheticians, I have a nurse practitioner who is also a certified nurse midwife and provides gynecology services to patients. I employ two medical assistants, a wellness counselor, and a massage therapist. Importantly, everyone on my team provides 360-degree support to the practice. Everyone is knowledgeable about all of the procedures we offer, can talk intelligently about them to patients and schedule efficiently. Despite the shift in the overall focus of the practice, my professional time is still spent primarily on gynecologic services.

Contemporary OB/GYN: What advice would you offer to peers who are thinking about integrating an energy-based device into their practice but remain reticent about making that leap?

Dr. Lord-Tomas: The time for lasers has come. The predictability of the results has really improved over the last few years. This is no longer new technology, and the applications and indications keep increasing and results keep improving. There should no longer be anything scary or intimidating about the technology. It's just a matter of deciding which applications you should focus on based on the needs of your practice.

As Ob/Gyns, we're already treating patients who want these services. By acquiring an energy-based device and expanding

your practice, you are going to fill a need and prevent possible leakage of your patients to other nearby practices that already offer these services. Incorporating one or more energy-based devices isn't as intimidating as it used to be perhaps 10 years ago. The technology and manufacturer support is so strong, and recouping the initial investment often takes only a few months.

There is a lot of talk at medical conferences about "physician burnout." With the stress related to insurance battles and administrative paperwork, providing aesthetic services can ease those burdens and provide a predictable and reliable additional revenue stream that can also energize your staff and revitalize your practice.

Dr. Carlson: When I first investigated acquiring an energy-based device for my practice, the marketplace was diverse with several companies from which to choose. Currently, post-consolidation of smaller companies, there are a handful of leaders that each offer an array of reliable devices. It is a matter of doing research and evaluating

which devices offer the best safety profile, will be easiest for you and your staff to use, and offer the best customer support. Don't underestimate the value of the manufacturer's company representatives and their availability and consistency. When you are considering your first purchase of an energy-based device, I recommend looking for a technology and a company that has demonstrated success over time and offers a multitude of services and devices. For me, Candela has been that company, and their support of my practice has enabled me to remain current and successful.

Contemporary OB/GYN: This has been a terrific discussion, and we want to thank both of you for your insights. I hope that our audience is able to take away some helpful information from our discussion as they consider the future evolution of their professional practice in regard to providing aesthetic services.

REFERENCE

1. Syneron-Candela. Treatments. Available at <https://syneron-candela.com/na/treatments>. Accessed January 30, 2019.

Key Takeaways

Integrating the first energy-based device into your Ob/Gyn practice:

- Thoroughly research services offered by other providers in your area
- Choose a device and a company that have been strong reputation and successful track record
- Choose a device that is FDA cleared for a variety of indications
- Ensure that the device manufacturer provides robust customer support that is included as part of the device purchase
- Start small by offering 1 or 2 basic procedures that fit with the overall demographic of your practice
- Educate your entire staff about any new services being offered so they can speak knowledgeably to patients
- Develop a comprehensive marketing campaign to reach potential customers outside of your current patient roster
- Believe in the device and the procedures you are offering
- Be the expert in what you offer