

Is Aesthetic Dermatology in Unsafe Hands?

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Abstract

Aesthetic Dermatology is one of the growing subspecialties that involves noninvasive to minimally invasive cosmetic procedures. It has overlapping scope with Aestheticians, Beauticians, and Non-Dermatologist medical practitioners, adding ambiguity and ethical issues. There have been global reports of invasive procedures done by Beauticians and Aestheticians leading to complications like scalp burn, infection and stroke which later led to development of guidelines in different countries. There is a strong need to develop similar guidelines in Nepal in collaboration with different stakeholders. Also, it is equally important to create public awareness so that public will be better informed about whom to consult for their skin concerns, and if needed report to governing bodies regarding negligence.

Key words: Aesthetician, Aesthetic Dermatology, Beautician, Complications, Guidelines, Public Awareness

Aesthetic Dermatology comprises all medical procedures that are aimed at improving the physical appearance and satisfaction of the patient, using non-invasive to minimally invasive cosmetic procedures.¹ It is one of the growing subspecialties that involves treatment with chemical peels, injectables, light and energy devices. This branch has some overlapping scope with Aestheticians, Beauticians, and Non-Dermatologist medical practitioners, adding ambiguity and ethical issues.² A nationwide state medical board regulation of minimally invasive cosmetic procedures done across different states of the United States also showed substantial variation (regarding supervision and delegation) in board regulation of minimally invasive cosmetic procedures (MICP).³

Aestheticians are formally trained non-medical manpowers who can perform basic facial skin treatments using specialized products and equipment. They are knowledgeable about skin anatomy and physiology as well as skin care but can't do invasive procedures that a trained medical practitioner (physician, physician assistant, dentist, registered nurse or another licensed healthcare practitioner) can do.⁴ Beauticians are people who do superficial

non-invasive cosmetic treatments of skin and hair, like manicures, pedicures, hair styling and makeup to name a few.² While aestheticians can do more than beauticians, they are also not allowed to perform invasive cosmetic procedures, such as botulinum toxin, filler injections, light and energy devices independently in most countries. In other countries, they are eligible to do under the supervision of certified physicians.³ The beauty sector is vast and growing but it has so far received little scholarly attention from bioethicists or medical ethicists.^{2,5} Things came to limelight only after a few incidences globally. In 2014, there was a case of second-degree burns resulting from incorrect use of laser technology for hair removal in the beauty salon which attracted attention across the nation's media of the Netherlands.^{6,7} In response to such incidents, the Dutch Minister of Health, Welfare, and Sports announced measures to increase oversight of the cosmetic sector and felt a need to develop national ethics guidelines for Aestheticians with a group of Bioethicists.^{2,7} Similar incidences of skin infections,⁸ strokes,⁹ and scalp burns⁸ were reported in beauty saloons' in the United States leading to the development of clearer guidelines there as well.³

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In recent years, in the name of beauty, due to increased demand in the market, many beauty parlors and centers have sprung up and are run by incompetent, non-registered, non-medical professionals who are propagating their unethical practices of invasive procedures and advertising in social media like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok.¹⁰ The market has been largely taken unethically by non-medicos like beauticians and non-certified so-called skin experts.^{2,3} Also, these non-clinical setups have no proper waste disposal and sterility protocol for injectables nor do they have adequate knowledge about safe work practice.¹¹ Lack of proper knowledge regarding injection techniques, anatomy and principles behind energy devices has jeopardize patients with unwanted complications and health hazards.

During a recent inspection of different unregistered skin care centers and beauty parlors in Kathmandu, Nepal, by Nepal Medical Council (NMC), it was found that invasive procedures were being carried out without registering the clinic and by unqualified and untrained

personnels. The NMC has warned such centers whose action is yet to be seen.¹²

According to the Nepal Medical Council Act, no medical professionals are allowed to perform procedures that are beyond their scope of practice and training.¹³ Nonallopathic health professionals and untrained medical practitioners are also observed providing aesthetic treatment. It is imperative that the Dermatology society of Nepal in collaboration with different stake holders and the curative service division of Ministry of Health and Population draft a policy that clarifies who is authorized to perform injectables and energy-based devices e.g. botulinum toxin injection, dermal fillers, thread lift, micro needling, CO₂ and fractional lasers etc. and take necessary action against those who does these procedures illegally. Also, it is equally important to create awareness among the public so that they will be better informed about whom to consult for their skin concerns, and if needed report to governing bodies regarding negligence.

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