International Hosting Offers New Opportunities for Aesthetic Education

Back in the very early days of aesthetic surgery, one-on-one mentoring was virtually the only way to learn our profession. For the most part, instruction took place in relative secrecy, since both student and teacher generally wished to avoid the scrutiny of their surgical colleagues, who almost universally disapproved of cosmetic surgery. There was often a significant fee involved in this personal instruction as well, and the relationship between teacher and student was akin to master and apprentice.

Today, most aesthetic surgeons regard freely sharing their knowledge and experience with colleagues as both a pleasure and a professional obligation. And, rather than a handful of “masters,” there are a great many well-recognized leaders in the field. Furthermore, leadership in aesthetic surgery is not the province of surgeons in any one nation or continent. In recent years, with the ease of electronic communications and international travel, all of us with an interest in aesthetic surgery education have enjoyed greater exposure to clinicians from all parts of the world and benefited from their diversity of experience. Yet what is usually lacking in these interactions is the opportunity to observe a particular surgeon in the clinical setting and gain an in-depth understanding of his or her personal techniques.

Recently, the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS) took steps to expand the opportunities for sharing knowledge and expertise, in this very personal way, among the international community. The ASAPS International Committee, of which I am Co-chair, has now compiled and published a database of ASAPS members who have volunteered to host international plastic surgeons who wish to observe them perform procedures. This database includes surgeons from 33 states within the United States and 17 countries worldwide, and it features many of the leading educators in our field.

It is surprising, in a way, that such a simple concept has taken so long to come to fruition. Certainly, many surgeons have welcomed visitors to observe procedures in their operating rooms, but this has usually been arranged through personal acquaintance. In contrast, the ASAPS International Committee database is a convenient and comprehensive resource that can be utilized by any member surgeon to pursue opportunities for observing specific techniques of interest.

The knowledge that a particular surgeon, whose work you have admired but whom you may not know personally, is willing to be observed in surgery certainly makes it much easier to pick up the phone and initiate a visit.

The international scope of this new program is, I believe, its most exciting aspect. I have enjoyed observing and operating with many of the international pioneers of aesthetic surgery—experiences that have greatly enriched my skills and my clinical practice. I strongly encourage other surgeons who may not have had the chance to interact closely with noted international colleagues to avail themselves of this unique opportunity.

I am proud, of course, that Aesthetic Surgery Journal, through its International Affiliate Society program, has led the way in developing closer ties between American surgeons and surgeons from South America to Europe to the Middle East to Asia, and has provided a superior showcase for publishing the most significant international work in aesthetic surgery. Likewise, I have been pleased to see ASAPS further develop the content of its Annual Meeting in recent years to provide attendees with a comprehensive program that is truly representative of international perspectives.

This latest ASAPS program to encourage international exchange and facilitate one-on-one observation of clinical procedures is one that undoubtedly will be welcomed by aesthetic surgeons everywhere. For more information, visit the ASAPS Members-Only Website at www.surgery.org/members.

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