

Business Spotlight

Birth Of The Med Spa

One San Francisco skin-care center helps define the concept.

Step into Epi Center MedSpa's plush waiting room and you may wonder if you're in the right place. Is this a skin care clinic or did I accidentally walk into a spa? The answer is both: The Epi Center MedSpa is as medically oriented as it is luxurious.

Located in San Francisco's famed 450 Sutter Building, the Epi Center MedSpa was among the first skin care clinics in the country to go "spa", according to Margaret Mitchell, the center's president. Mitchell co-founded the clinic with Dr. Patrick H. Bitter Sr., a dermatologist who is known worldwide for his pioneering skin care treatments. "We came to San Francisco in 1998 to open an elegant place that wouldn't feel like a doctor's office," Mitchell says. Their concept was to train registered nurses and aestheticians—who naturally have more time to spend with patients—to perform the procedures. Beautiful artwork, fresh flowers, a makeup station, and comfortable treatment rooms completed the transformation.

According to the International Medical Spa Association, "a medical spa is a facility that operates under the full-time, on-site supervision of a licensed health-care professional." In addition to four registered nurses, led by Director of Nursing Jennifer Schaefer-Fick, RN, BSN, and two clinical aestheticians, the Epi Center MedSpa also has a physician and Medical Director, Dr. Scott W. Mosser, on the premises. This arrangement is not always the case, according to Dr. Mosser who joined the Epi Center MedSpa in January of 2005. Doctors can be located several towns away or—in some cases—hundreds of miles away from the center they oversee, he says. Dr. Mosser doubles as the center's Medical Director and has a plastic surgery practice located in the same building. Dr. Bitter Sr.—who participated in FDA clinical trials for hair removal, collagen, and developed the PhotoFacialSM procedure that has become one of the most popular skin rejuvenation techniques worldwide—offers an additional layer of supervision in his work as an advisor and consultant. He and Dr. Mosser conduct ongoing workshops with the center's staff members, and have established a Physician's Training Center on the premises where physicians and their staff come to learn how to perform cosmetic procedures and to model themselves after the Epi Center MedSpa concept. "We're very lucky to have a dermatologist with such experience with lasers as our founder," Mitchell says, "and fortunate to have Dr. Mosser who completes our original concept by providing the next step to those who are now candidates for surgical rejuvenation."

A-Z SERVICES

Perhaps the most unique aspect of the Epi Center MedSpa is the staff's unparalleled concern for their patients, who learn not only about treatments that can address their various conditions but also about long-term skin care. ("What good is it if a patient gets treated for sun damage if they're still going outside without sunscreen?" Dr. Bitter Sr., says.) Educational pamphlets are available in the waiting room, and each patient receives a complimentary consultation to assess their needs. "We're a full service skin rejuvenation center," Mitchell says. "We treat everyone from 13-year-olds with acne to 89-year-olds looking to feel younger."

SIGNATURE CLINICAL SKIN TREATMENTS

Designed by Dr. Bitter Sr. in conjunction with Alisha Valverde, the center's Director of Aesthetics, the center's signature clinical skin treatments combine such age-defying techniques as medical grade facials. According to Valverde, each procedure is corrective and is designed to address a specific concern. For example, the Dermabright Treatment uses microdermabrasion, lactic acid and iontophoresis to lighten pigmentation, while the Acne Detox Treatment with Blu-U uses blue-light therapy in conjunction with a clinical detoxifying skin care treatment to combat acne. They also develop a customized skin care program for patients to enhance and maintain their treatment results. The clinical aestheticians work closely with the team of registered nurses to prepare clients' skin prior to as well as after some of the center's laser and intense pulsed light treatments—a critical step in achieving the type of results patients are looking to achieve, according to both Dr. Bitter Sr., and Dr. Mosser.

INTENSE PULSED LIGHT THERAPY

Dr. Bitter has been practicing in the Bay Area for more than 37 years, and was among the first dermatologists in the country to work with intense pulsed light, which uses multiple wavelengths selectively absorbed by abnormally dilated vessels or pigmentation as an alternative to more aggressive treatments like laser resurfacing. In 1998, Bitter invented the PhotoFacialSM treatment which is offered, along with PhotoDynamic Therapy, to patients suffering from rosacea, flushing, age spots, acne scars, under eye circles, and large pores and wrinkles. For those looking to soften lines and wrinkles, the center offers a variety of different fillers, including Botox Cosmetic, Restylane and Collagen. Dr. Bitter Sr. is considered an expert in the field of laser hair removal, and the center's numerous lasers can permanently reduce unwanted hair on a variety of skin types. Schaefer-Fick, the center's Director of Nursing since 1998, performs treatments and trains and oversees the clinical staff. A nurse by trade, her background is particularly helpful when it comes to working with patients.

"As a nurse, our role is to treat the whole person. We work not only with a patient's aesthetic concerns, but also around other health issues and underlying medical conditions," she says.

PLASTIC SURGERY

The center also offers both facial and full-body rejuvenation procedures through Dr. Mosser, including neck lifts, facelifts, rhinoplasty and liposuction as well as many minimally invasive techniques that reduce down time. Dr. Mosser operates his own plastic-surgery practice just one floor up from the MedSpa, and in addition to his expertise in surgical rejuvenation and body contouring, Mosser is an expert in treating people who have undergone major weight loss and need surgery to correct loose skin, and he finds such cases particularly gratifying. Whether a patient's goals are rejuvenation or enhancement of the face, improvement of breast shape or size, or contouring of the body with liposuction or a tummy tuck, his patients love his demeanor and are confident that they are in good, experienced hands.



EPI CENTER MEDSPA

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