

# Documentation Tips for Dermatologists Providing Cosmetic Procedures

After the consultation, documentation is the next key consideration for successful cosmetic procedures.

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An effective consultation lays the groundwork for a satisfactory patient experience. The next critical element—for both patient satisfaction and physician peace of mind—is adequate documentation. Good documentation obviously may prove critical from a medico-legal standpoint, but it also has important implications for the overall care of the patient and can actually facilitate a stronger physician/patient relationship. As discussed last month, a worthwhile consultation achieves important goals for both the patient and physician (Table 1). Among the primary objectives of the consultation are to clearly identify the patient's treatment goals, outline treatment options, and discuss costs, downtime, healing, and complications. All these points and more must be documented in the patient's chart.

## Consistency

Just as there are certain standard elements of all good consultations, there are certain standard elements of every well-documented chart. As noted, this starts with the patient's concern or reason for seeking treatment. Clearly and accurately record the patient's primary and secondary goals for aesthetic improvement as well as any associated concerns (fear of needles, "tried a peel with Dr. Soandso before but was not too impressed," etc.). When possible, use the patient's own words. Record all of the points that you address with the patient regarding pre- and post-op care require-

ments and instructions, downtime, and possible complications and their treatment. If the patient is at particular risk for a specific complication, address this and document the discussion.

If you distribute any prepared educational packets and/or pre-op medications or cosmeceuticals, make a note in the record. When you provide care instructions and/or post-op kits at the time of therapy note this, as well.

Your patient charts should have a consistent format from patient-to-patient and visit-to-visit. This helps ensure that you cover and document all pertinent points and allows you to quickly and easily find information when you need it. Pre-printed charts, diagrams, and questionnaires specific to common treatments or complaints can be especially helpful to make documentation more efficient and more consistent. Let nursing staff assist with information collection and screening.

## Informed Consent

Any dermatologist providing cosmetic interventions understands the importance of the informed consent. Provide an informed consent for every appropriate situation, be sure it is signed, and be sure it is filed in the patient's record. Never perform a procedure without the signed consent. Instruct staff to "troubleshoot" charts prior to treatment to be sure the patient has reviewed and signed all the appropriate forms and that these are in the chart. If forms are missing, staff must obtain them or red-

**Table 1. Goals of Consultation**

### Physician

- Identify patient needs
- Identify patient goals
- Understand patient time constraints, budget

### Patient

- Hear treatment options and alternatives
- Understand process, down-time, healing, numbers of procedures required
- Understand risks
- Understand costs

*\* This table was inadvertently omitted from the December column in which it was to originally appear.*

flag the file so that you can discuss missing elements with the patient.

## A Picture is Worth...

Photo documentation is a critical element of the chart. Good quality photos are essential to document the patient's appearance upon presentation and at follow-up to demonstrate the improvement provided by an intervention. Sometimes patients simply "forget" what they looked like before a procedure and may fail to recognize the degree of improvement achieved. This is not only the case with "modest" results. Due to the gradual nature of the healing process in some cases and simple human nature patients may not appreciate how different they may look. Photos make it much easier to visualize improvement.

Photos also help document pre-existing features the patient might have overlooked prior to an intervention but find troubling afterwards. For example, a

patient concerned about deep nasolabial folds may not consciously pay much attention to a nearby atrophic scar on the cheek. Once the folds have been filled, the patient's focus may shift to that scar, and he or she may even think you caused it. Facial asymmetry is very common, but frequently not recognized by patients until a procedure such as botulinum toxin injections or filler placement has been performed. Photo documentation will quickly settle these types of questions or concerns.

### Get Personal

In addition to all of the medico-legally pertinent data collected, be sure to record some personal information about each patient. Obtaining personal information serves two important purposes. First, it may reveal more about what the patient hopes to achieve through an intervention and why he or she is pursuing treatment (for example, "I want to look fresh for my daughter's wedding in three months"). It may also help you avoid providing treatment at an inopportune time (for example, "I want to look fresh for my daughter's wedding in three *days*").

Second, referring to personal information lets the patient know that you care about them and helps build rapport. Ask the patient about a trip they had planned or about a social event. It goes a long way toward establishing a long-term relationship.

### Plan and Execute

In the consultation or pre-treatment phase, record the treatment plan you propose. This becomes an easy reference at the time of treatment. Immediately before providing treatment, briefly review that plan with the patient.

As you provide an intervention, you and/or your staff should clearly and accurately record what you do. In some instances diagrams are helpful to record injection sites

and volumes. With lasers/devices, record treatment location, energy levels, and passes. In the event of optimal results, detailed records make it easier to repeat success with future treatments. Alternatively, such records will help you fine-tune the treatment to enhance results if necessary.

Finally, a detailed, accurate, and thorough record of the procedure and amounts of materials used will allow for accurate billing and support charges should patients question charges.

### Document All Patient Encounters

Good charting goes beyond the office visit. It is important to document all patient-related encounters. Any phone calls to patients should be documented. It is routine in our office to call patients following procedures and these calls must be recorded, even when an attempt to reach the patient is unsuccessful. Record the date, time and number dialed in the chart. If patients call the office with questions or requests, these should be recorded as well. Finally, document any phone calls relating to the patient.

These might include calls to pharmacies, insurance companies, or labs.

### Use the Chart

When you make good documentation a habit, it's important to make use of the chart when patients return for follow-up. The majority of your patients probably are quite pleased with the results you provide. Among those patients who are dissatisfied, the underlying issue may not actually be the quality of service you provided; rather, it could be a separate cosmetic complaint they failed to mention previously, a complaint that you discussed and together decided to address with a subsequent treatment at a later date, or perhaps the patient's desired degree of improvement wasn't possible because he or she refused a complimentary procedure you had strongly advised. These are all issues that would be reflected in a well-documented chart. Avoid being argumentative or defensive. Simply be conversational as you remind the patient of your previous discussions and steer dialogue toward current options. Use photos when necessary to help patients better appreciate the degree of improvement provided. ☒

## New In Your Practice

**Ful-filling Wrinkle Fighter.** To correct smile lines for your patients, consider Artes Medical's ArteFill, the first non-resorbable aesthetic injectible implant approved by the FDA. ArteFill is indicated for the correction of nasolabial folds. Unlike existing dermal fillers that are completely metabolized by the body, ArteFill is the first product in a category of non-resorbable dermal fillers; the company says it provides a permanent support structure for enduring wrinkle correction. For more information, visit [www.artefill.com](http://www.artefill.com).

**Coming Attractions.** Look for new cosmetic lasers and light-based systems from Candela this year. Combining technologies from the GentleYAG and the GentleLASE lasers, the new GentleMAX will be used for removal of unwanted hair on all skin types and for vascular and pigmented lesions, leg and facial veins, and wrinkle reduction and skin tightening. GentleMAX provides two wavelength capabilities in a single stand-alone device, Candela says. Candela's new low-power Erbium laser, SmoothPeel may become a laser alternative to chemical peels in your practice, the company says. SmoothPeel offers several treatments options with downtime ranging from minimal up to just a few days. Systems will launch at next month's AAD Annual Meeting.

