

Iris Rubin, MD



The Fixer

"I love science and how things work," says Dr. Rubin, who has applied that love to various aspects of the patient experience. She was once called out by the head of her practice for not selling enough product; she was uncomfortable selling products that were more expensive than drugstore ones, without a point of differentiation and greater benefit. Now, as founder of a haircare products line, Dr. Rubin is not actively practicing dermatology but still focuses on what attracted her to the specialty: "an opportunity to fix things."

Even as a child, Iris Rubin, MD says, she "never liked to see anyone suffering." Her interest in medicine shifted from internal medicine to dermatology—"I loved the visual nature of it. I loved the fact that you could do medical dermatology. You could also work with lasers." For years she worked part-time at Children's National Hospital in Washington, DC as medical director of the vascular laser program, which, "was really gratifying." She left practice to launch a line of skin-friendly haircare products, because she believes hair care can dramatically impact skin.

What prompted you to launch SEEN? Why did you leave practice?

Iris Rubin, MD: I discovered what I considered a big clinical problem that was an unmet need. I, personally, was getting breakouts and acne from haircare products. I started to wonder how many other people are getting acne or other skin issues from haircare products. We did a study showing that any time you use a haircare product, it deposits on your skin and can stay on your skin for hours—not just on your scalp, but also on your face and your back.

We developed SEEN, which took more than four years, to be haircare products that are skin friendly—non-comedogenic and non-irritating. It took so long to develop because of the fact that we were trying to hit two metrics: beautiful hair and healthy skin.

Recently, we did a dermatologist-graded acne study that showed that by changing to SEEN, 70 percent of study

participants with body acne improved after eight weeks, and 52 percent with face acne improved after eight weeks. Our four-week dermatologist-graded dry scalp study showed that 93 percent of subjects with dry scalp improved.

I believe haircare products are skincare products, since they get on the skin and can stay on the skin for hours. They just have not been developed that way.

When we developed SEEN products, I was still in practice. To be in the operating room, launch a product line, have three kids, I felt like I had a lot going on at the same time. It took about four years to develop our first products. The tipping point was once I had a product in hand, I realized that launching a brand is not a part-time job. I could have handed it off to someone, but I wanted to be involved; for me, it's all encompassing to be an entrepreneur.

Were you always interested in business?

Dr. Rubin: I have an identical twin sister who went to Harvard Business School when I went to Harvard Medical School. And even when we were kids, she was always starting businesses. When I was transitioning from internal medicine to dermatology, I wanted to explore business and worked briefly at the consulting firm McKinsey & Co. So, I was getting some business experience along the way, but I never really saw myself as a business person until I launched SEEN.

I love learning new things, so SEEN has been really exciting in that sense. I soon realized that I needed help on the busi-

ness side so I partnered with my twin sister's husband Greg, who's a Wharton MBA, to launch SEEN. I'm mostly focused on the science side, the IP side, the pipeline. Greg heads up operations and marketing. We work together on strategy and business development.

What is your best advice to others?

Dr. Rubin: If you have an idea, don't listen to naysayers. I think when things are innovative, often people will say, "No, that's not going to work." But if you really believe in something, do the research. Getting the science to prove your hypothesis is important.

It's important to make sure your concept will work as a business, because you don't want to develop something and then not be able to get it out to people who would benefit.

Developing the product is just one part of the process. Getting the right partners is important, because it's not something you can do alone. You need the right partners for formulation, marketing, operations and more.

Get a gut check on whether or not your idea is something that's really going to help people by talking to people and doing your research on what's out there, and where the unmet need is. Then get the science down and see if there's a business model that works. Is there anything else out there like what you want to build? Is yours better? And then, obviously, funding, which is another important aspect, because developing your product takes resources. ■

Read more: [PracticalDermatology.com](https://www.practicaldermatology.com).