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How the Addiction Started

Women's Wear Daily

Medispas Make Spa Their Focus

By Kavita Daswani

LOS ANGELES - Now that medispas are an established component of the spa world, with a combination of both pampering and medical treatments available under one roof, even oncologists and gynecologists are getting in on the trend.

The cross-integration between conventional medical fields, professional skin care services and indulgences like massages and manicures was a major focus at the Los Angeles Spa & Resort/Medical Spa Expo and Conference held recently at the Convention Center.

The second of what is expected to become an increasingly significant annual event, the show ? which comprised an exhibition floor as well as numerous seminars and conferences held over a three-day period ? reaffirmed that the fields of medicine and spa treatments once considered elitist are fast colliding.

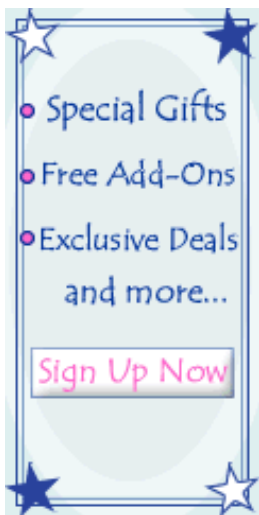
"It's a very big trend," said Eileen Baird, vice president and show manager of the event, which is organized by Reed Exhibitions and which also organizes sister events in Miami and New York. The number of preregistered attendees was 40 percent higher than last year, she said.

Web sites like 1-800-MediSpas.com are getting some 140,000 hits a month from people interested in locating a venue where they can get a massage and a Botox shot at the same time.

Certainly, across the board ? from makers of high-tech skin care treatments to creators of organic bath products ? the emphasis seemed to be on the convergence of different spa, beauty and medical disciplines.

"Medispas are no longer just medical, and are getting creative with the way they look and feel," said John Atwood, in charge of strategic partnerships at Universal Companies, a Virginia-based firm that has supplied spas with everything from equipment to body products for the past 23 years.

Atwood said with the boom in spas across the country ? his company last year supplied more than 30,000 different venues ? spas are increasingly looking to differentiate themselves. For some, that might mean sourcing extremely high-end linens and sheets while others are choosing to reach out more to male customers. Medical clinics, such as internal medicine practices and those in obstetrics, are also increasingly investigating how they can incorporate spa treatments into their practices to allow for a secondary revenue stream. Atwood said this is largely due to the growing mainstream acceptability of spas.



That's certainly something that Mary Blackmon de Roker is seeing. The chief executive officer and president of Hoboken, N.J.-based Web site spa-addicts.com, which averages some 600,000 hits a month, said that spas are now dotted throughout almost every American town and suburb and are no longer just for the wealthy.

"It's booming, and people are seeing it more as a necessity than a luxury," she said.

Her Web site is filled with tips, discounts and exclusive offers, although Blackmon de Roker agrees that there is a lot more interest these days in medical spas and "results-oriented skin care."

Others among the 200 exhibitors at the show said that the emphasis on treatments that were technologically advanced yet noninvasive was in sync with both medispas as well as more traditional spas.

Neostrata, a New Jersey-based company that was launching its lactobionic acid line of products, said that alpha hydroxy acids, which can cause redness after use, have evolved into something called polyhydroxy acids, which are much more gentle.

"A lot of people still love AHAs, but this is really the next generation," said Jeanie Matlock, an account executive with the company. "There really is no irritation. People put it on directly at the salon or spa, but can also use it at home," she said, adding that interest from the medispa community was "booming." In the last five years, the company has gone from being in 100 doors to more than 500.

At Actifirm, a Dallas-based skin care company, antiaging treatments based on a specific type of mushroom are having a lot of success within medispas, said co-founder Elysian Bishop.

"Women want to see an instant result after a professional peel in a dermatologist office," she said.

A subsequent 45-day at-home product kit ? which retails for \$265 ? comes in measured doses in syringes, and, despite its relative newness, is already in about 100 locations nationwide.

"It's all about healthy aging," said Ed Loeffler, vice president of La Fleur Repairer, a Minneapolis-based company whose equipment is designed to work from the inside out.

"It's really about repairing damage using microcurrents allowing the body to function at a higher level," said Loeffler of an electrostimulation computer made by his company, which works on scar reduction and reshaping the body and post-surgery healing. An at-home version for retail distribution is currently in the works.

Another busy section at the event was around Integree, a European system that was making its U.S. debut at the show with treatments based on cryogenics - essentially using freezing technology for noninvasive processes to deal with blemishes, acne, stretch marks and cellulite.

Annie Lin, manager of Jing Inc, the U.S. distributors of the process, said the equipment was designed to "rebalance the system by attacking blemishes from inside out," using a combination of essential oils, body wraps and baths before applying frozen components and an electric current.

Other companies launching at the spa show included Los Angeles-based Travertine, whose owner, former international lawyer Terry Carter, wanted to parlay his love of spas into a business. The result is a line of unisex, organic, botanical-based products that range from jojoba body creams to turbinado sugar scrubs.

Carter said the line, which sells for between \$7 and \$40 at retail, was directed toward high-end salons and day spas, as well as medispas.

Products with no preservatives or synthetic ingredients continue to prove popular, said Dr. Tony Kovacs, president of UV Natural, a sun care line from Australia that has just made its U.S. entry.

"People are looking for a much more natural product," said Kovacs, who added that the chemicals in most sunscreens have detrimental effects on the skin. His UV Natural line, which can be used on infants, is made from grape-seed, macadamia, safflower and sesame oils, has a high sun protection factor and retails for between \$12 and \$25 a bottle.

Other exhibitors are capitalizing on the demand among spagoers for a first-rate experience. Lori Mulligan and Lynne Gerhards are founders of New Jersey-based Pure Inventions, a green tea extract that is now the top-selling product at New York's Bliss spa. Both certified clinical nutritionists and longtime advocates of green tea, they created a line of six flavors, including lemon, pineapple-coconut and peach ? one dropper-full of extract in a bottle of water has the same strength as 15 tea bags, without the caffeine. The line is now in 300 doors across the country, including doctors' and dentists' offices, as well as spas, where it is offered to clients and patients. It's also sold for \$29.95 for a 60-serving bottle.

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