

# Introduction

Dear Readers:

You are living in exciting times—a time when the chasm between medicine and esthetics grows smaller and smaller each day. In my opinion, the spa of the future will offer a wider array of medical services. While there are medical services that currently exist alongside spa therapies, there is a whole field of esthetics and medicine not yet performed that could conceivably blend into the pampering process. This is the science of life extension—getting older without aging.

It has not yet been defined what actually causes aging. Is it your genes? Your lifestyle and diet? Genes are only part of the reason some people live a long time; however, lifestyle plays an important role in the process, and this includes how people take care of themselves, whether they smoke or not, whether they exercise or not, whether they are constantly under a lot of stress. And what do they eat? Do they eat on the fast lane from the drive-through joints or do they find the time to eat healthy, wholesome foods prepared well? There is some thinking that what people eat and how much they eat plays a vital role in leading to a longer life. Research on aging is well underway and, in some studies, animals on a normal diet with sufficient needed nutrients are found to live longer and have less illness than those who are not on such a healthy plan.

It is also noted that people who are overweight are more likely to develop certain age-related diseases such as heart and blood vessel disease, high blood pressure, arthritis, cancer and diabetes.

In the meantime, there are spa's offering an array of services ... ranging from antiaging—which does include a lifestyle change, to treating acne, rosacea and pigmentary disorders and medical spa's that offer more invasive types of treatments, primarily for the face.

Then you have the spa's that offer serenity and peace of mind, nurturing-type treatments that make a person feel good emotionally, spiritually and physically.

Spa statistics from the *2007 ISPA Industry Study* show that this industry is growing and the United States generated an estimated \$9.4 billion in 2006. Trends include the niche or specialty medical spas and hospital-based medical spas, etc. I believe, with education and successful protocols in place, this trend will become a well-received and accepted new modality in the industry.

*Oncology Esthetics* falls into both of these categories, especially if catering to recovering hospital patients and their families and friends. *Oncology Esthetics* can also be performed in a wellness or day spa provided strict sanitation practices are followed and the estheticians are certified to perform these services.

Since the cancer statistics are rising, EVERY spa that offers esthetics, massage therapy and nail technology should have both licensed AND oncology-certified estheticians/massage therapists/nail technicians on their staff.

I would encourage every esthetician who takes this profession seriously to continue to attend advanced education, to read and attend classes and be the best they can be. Once you become recognized as an expert in the modality of oncology esthetics and you provide the best possible outcome for your cancer clients and their safety, you are successful.

Many licensed estheticians, once qualified and with some work experience, may choose to specialize in different areas, whether it be medical spas, and work with cosmetic dermatologists, or plastic surgeons, or whether it be in a hospital spa environment, or a wellness spa, or any other variation of spa. I am encountering more and more estheticians, massage therapists and nail technicians deciding to investigate how to treat people living with cancer since they have a family member or friend who has had or has cancer. They want to provide nurturing, comfort and pain relief for this person. So, the disease is directing the lives of some estheticians and their

work. For the clients, knowing that their chosen esthetician that is providing them with a spa service is qualified and trained to deal with their disease, and takes the added fear away from the clients that they will be in the best hands.

Training for oncology esthetics is currently being provided by one organization based out of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, and it holds classes in Phoenix, Arizona, and on location globally. It can be located at [www.touchforcanceronline.com](http://www.touchforcanceronline.com). This organization has the expertise of physicians, nurses, estheticians, massage therapists and nail technicians who are currently working in oncology hospital wards, cancer centers and spas that follow strict protocols for the safety of the cancer client.

Skin care treatments are an important factor in the growth of the spa industry and, although the basics are taught at schools, there is a definite need for advanced education in this industry. Nurses are also beginning to find out that practicing esthetics is another rewarding avenue to make a career, and many medical spas are requiring medically trained personnel to handle certain treatments. Training at esthetic school level provides a basic understanding of esthetics, therefore this presents an opportunity for advanced education classes to help bridge this gap and get closer to the level of those trained in nursing.

Cancer statistics are increasing, and more and more spas are opening up. I am constantly hearing about cancer clients being offered gift certificates to spas, and I also hear a fair amount of horror stories of how clients receive massages and are sick for three days afterward, or the clients weren't even asked any questions about their health and medical histories. I sat in a well-known spa's reception area one day, just sitting and watching the process for client check-in as I was doing its product training. Some of the products required questions to be asked of clients regarding medications or supplements. I saw the front desk staff provide a one-page form that the clients filled out and signed, and then gave back to the front desk staff member who did not look at it, but promptly filed it away in a drawer. This form was never seen by the estheticians, and it occurred

to me that the estheticians probably wouldn't ask questions, or if they asked questions—would they ask the questions that pertain to the clients and their health histories? So the question is how would these estheticians provide a fulfilling, beneficial service to their clients not knowing anything about possible reactions from products or the treatment on this clients' skin?

During the past few years, as head of spa education and the training departments for some of the leading international skin care manufacturers, I have been asked on numerous occasions about products and ingredients and if they are suitable for use on spa clients undergoing cancer therapies. It brings hope and encouragement that in a way these companies are taking the lead in formulating safe skin care products designed specifically for cancer patients such as the TecNiche Therapies line, [www.tecnichetherapies.com](http://www.tecnichetherapies.com).

Much research has been done during the past few years, and I have found that esthetic/cosmetology school curricula do not include anything about various diseases such as cancer. Aesthetic schools in both the United States and Canada provide a basic curriculum—every state/province requiring 300–1200 hours of education, but this alone does not adequately prepare estheticians to deal with spa clients who have diseases. Mostly one is taught to refuse a treatment. I find the esthetic education in North America at a very low level, which is why the credibility of estheticians is often questioned by medical staff when wanting to work with new sophisticated modalities such as chemical peels or lasers.

One organization in the United States, the National Coalition of Estheticians, Manufacturers/Distributors & Associations (NCEA) is lobbying for all state boards across the country to increase their school hours and to add more education for certification and licensing. I absolutely support this effort. Countries such as South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, Singapore, Europe and the United Kingdom provide far better training and far more hours. One known school in South Africa is having its students work on clients with cancer twice as week as part of its basic esthetic training. I have come across a few estheticians and massage therapists who have been in

this field for a quite a few years who are in fact working with cancer clients and have been for quite some time.

For its new certification, the NCEA advocates that estheticians NOT work on clients with cancer and skin cancer, and I completely understand and agree with this. The level of education is not sufficient in North America to support working on a client with a disease. While persons with cancer and undergoing cancer therapies should be permitted to have spa treatments, they need to be treated by licensed estheticians, massage therapists and nail technicians who have gone beyond basic education and have specialized in the field of oncology.

When referring to cancer, what about skin cancer statistics? Surely estheticians, if they were knowledgeable to some degree about recognizing skin cancers on their clients' skin, can refer their clients to see a physician, and possibly save their lives? The professional esthetician is the perfect screener for this job.

With skin cancer/cancer statistics on the rise:

- Where does one learn more about recognizing these different skin cancers?
- Where does one learn more about skin reactions from various cancer therapies, and how are they handled in the spa environment?
- Where does one learn more about ingredients in skin care products and how they may react on the skin?
- What about those persons living with cancer who are seeking a relaxing, nurturing spa treatment with someone who has knowledge in how to handle their disease?
- How come you find more people becoming massage therapists and estheticians when a loved one goes through the trauma of cancer therapies?

- Where do licensed/certified estheticians go for advanced education to enhance their careers?

Estheticians need to seek out advanced training if they have an interest in and want to be a part of the change that they would like to see in the world by empowering themselves with advanced knowledge.

Today, discussions of cancer are so different from times when people either whispered about the disease or avoided the topic completely. Today, cancer is a part of society and people are learning more and more about it and how to deal with it.

All people with cancer, whether in treatment or recovery, can receive some form of therapy, especially in the spa environment. Temporary restrictions may be placed on those people who are undergoing radioactive radiation therapy, however restrictions usually only last for a week.

During cancer treatments and the recovery period, which can last up to a year or longer, the body needs all the strength it has to heal, instead of fighting more stressors such as vigorous, aggressive spa treatments. ‘Soft touch’ spa treatments can begin immediately after surgery if the client chooses to go ahead with them. Adjustments may be required at the spa—with the clients, the estheticians and/or the treatments—so the clients can enjoy their sessions.

Estheticians must touch their clients with gentleness and be considerate of how they are feeling and help remove any thoughts of fear. Spa treatments must be given in a nonaggressive or light application so as not to retraumatize the clients—always remember to do too little rather than too much.

Professionally yours,

**Morag Currin**