

face it!

by Sandi Riegert

Can simple injections turn back the sands of time?

If a doctor offered to wave a magic wand and make you look younger and more refreshed, you'd take him up on it, wouldn't you? What if that same physician was wielding a needle?

That's the question thousands of women and men are asking themselves as they weigh the pros and cons of trying Botox™, an injectable drug approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the temporary reduction of facial lines and wrinkles.

Botox™, or botulinum toxin type A, is a toxin produced by the bacterium that causes botulism, a form of food poisoning. When injected directly into a muscle, the drug temporarily "paralyzes" that muscle, rendering it less able to move. The drug has been used since 1990 to treat various nerve disorders, including dystonia (involuntary contraction of the muscles) and spasticity (muscle tightness), ease migraine and tension headaches, and block sweat glands to control excessive perspiration.

In April 2002, the FDA approved the

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drug for cosmetic use. Since then, according to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS), it has become the fastest-growing cosmetic procedure in the industry.

The procedure works like this: approximately one-tenth of a teaspoonful of Botox™ serum is injected into facial muscles, usually on the forehead or between the eyes. Within days, the drug “paralyzes” the muscles, reducing the contractions that cause skin to crease and temporarily erasing the wrinkles formed by repetitive movement.

The result? Less noticeable frown lines, forehead furrows and crow’s-feet and a younger, more relaxed appearance.

“In effect, what it does is stop wrinkles in motion,” said Dr. Jane Chew of the Columbia Dermatology Center. “People will think you look more rested, like you got a good night’s sleep or took a vacation.”

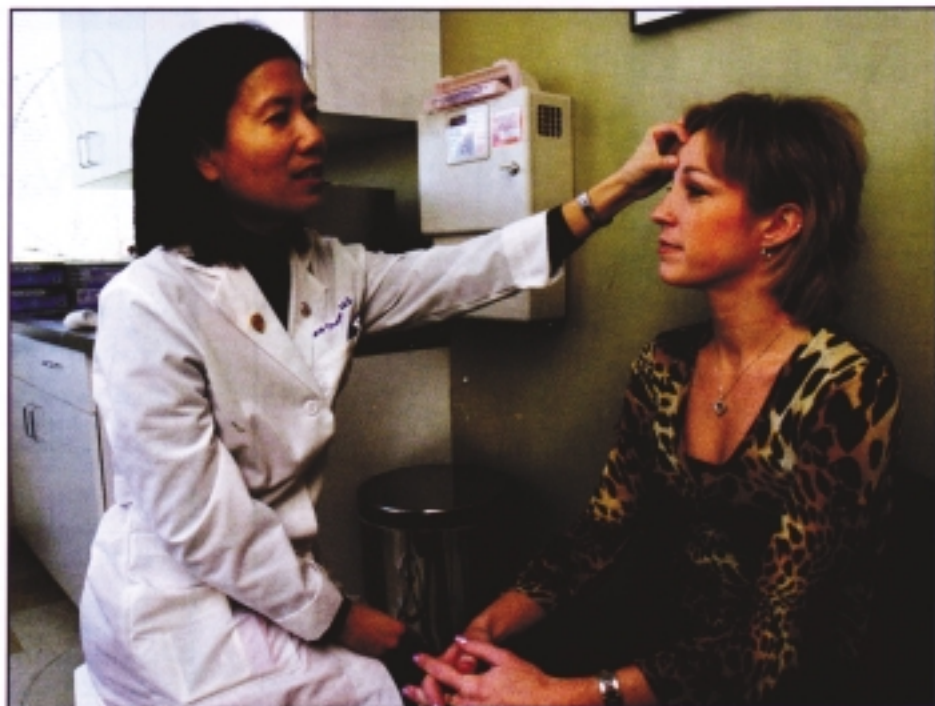
Chew said she is performing increasing numbers of Botox™ injections, with more women than men stepping into her office. “I am seeing patients in their 20s get Botox™ to prevent wrinkles, people in their 30s, 40s and 50s getting rid of wrinkles, and people who just get it done for a special occasion, like a reunion or a wedding,” she said. “Unless you Botox™ your whole face ... it looks very natural.”

Lynn’s Day Spa in Columbia frequently hosts “Botox parties,” where Dr. Henok Araya, a licensed dermatologist from the Vita Surgical Center in Washington, D.C., comes in and gives Botox™ to groups of women. “The parties are a big hit,” said owner Lynn Shannon. “Women come in, enjoy sparkling water and hors d’oeuvres and do something relaxing for themselves.”

According to the Botox™ Cosmetic Web site, the drug is approved for use in adults up to age 65 and is especially effective at easing forehead wrinkles caused by corrugator muscles (which cause horizontal wrinkles) and procerus muscles (which cause vertical wrinkles).

Botox™ injections do not last forever — most patients see their best results two to three days after the procedure and can expect to remain wrinkle-free for approximately three to four months. After that time, they will continue to need the injections.

However, people who are given too much of the serum or who are injected in the wrong spot may suffer drooping of the eye, which can last for several weeks, and with repeated injections, a permanent thin-



Dr. Jane Chew and Donna Thomas, a member of Dr. Chew’s office staff as well as a patient, discuss the procedure.

ning of the muscles. Due in part to this, the American Academy of Dermatology has issued a warning advising against having Botox™ done anywhere except in a dermatologist’s office.

Dr. Araya said he does caution patients not to take aspirin, vitamin E or major blood thinners, all of which increase the risk of bruising and bleeding, prior to an injection. He also tells patients to avoid Botox™ if they are allergic to eggs or have a severe allergy to penicillin.

To further reduce the incidence of side effects, Shannon said the spa discourages massaging the area afterward and does not serve alcohol at the parties.

Despite the risks, the drug appeals to a wide range of people, Chew said, largely due to the ease of the procedure and the cost.

“It is one of the least expensive cosmetic procedures out there,” Chew said, noting that most Botox™ procedures run between \$300 and \$500.

“Maybe people don’t feel right about getting a face lift, but they can come in, get Botox™ easily and inexpensively and be on their way,” she said.

Chew stressed the importance of having Botox™ done by a trained and licensed physician. Botox Cosmetic offers a listing of physicians on the Web site, a wise starting point, Chew said, for anyone considering the procedure. Patients should also note that Botox™ can be done around the mouth and on the neck, but only by physicians who have received special training.

Part of the drug’s appeal is also that it can be administered, relatively painlessly,

in about 10 minutes. Though the procedure consists of a series of tiny injections, Chew said they feel like “tiny pinches” that are over with very quickly. There is no recovery time, and patients can resume normal activity immediately after leaving the physician’s office.

One 38-year-old woman, who did not want to be identified, said she saw dramatic results after trying Botox™ last year on her forehead and to fix crow’s-feet around her eyes. She loved the effects so much she returned a second time to have her forehead done again.

The pain, she said, was minimal; however, “you do get an odd feeling of tightness afterward,” she noted. She also found that her face was reddened and that she had very slight bruising at the injection sites for a day or two.

But the results, the woman added, were well worth it. “You don’t look different, but you do look younger.”

For her, the best part of getting Botox™ was that she could look and feel better without making a lifetime commitment or drastically altering her appearance. “In a few months, this will just gradually wear off.”

She would love to return a third time and plans to if prices on the procedure ever drop. “It’s a lot of money to keep spending every couple of months,” she said. **CM**