A reflection on learning opportunities and the impact they have had on practice

As autonomous health professionals, aesthetic nurses should take advantage of all the learning opportunities that come their way. However, there are some conferences and seminars that are more useful for practice than others, and being able to distinguish what events work for you is advantageous. Yvonne Senior looks back at the highlights and heroes of her nursing education.

I feel with some conviction that I can refer to myself as a veteran of aesthetics, and following a recent milestone event I found myself reflecting on many areas of my life and career. Throughout my time as a nurse, I have had a passion for education and development. This, alongside the ongoing ‘level 7’ chatter, led me down the reflective path of looking at what exposure to learning in aesthetics had resulted in changes small and large to my practice.

During my relatively long period of time practising in aesthetics, I have been privileged enough to be offered many educational opportunities over and above the formal academic learning I have tortured myself with. As the chair of the Private Independent Aesthetic Practices Association (PIAPA) and a trainer and mentor, I often have individuals asking me what the most significant learning materials were to me. Reflecting on this, I realised I more commonly refer to the experiences I have been lucky enough to have offered, and so I will go on to share these.

So what has actually led to practice changes? Many years ago, Q-Med were beginning to demonstrate an understanding of competency-based training and under the auspices of Wendy Rogers (now Allergan), produced what promised to evolve into an excellent workbook that instigated my further reading into many areas of injectable aesthetics. Sadly, this was lost in the sale and transition of Restylane to Galderma.

Another immensely significant learning curve in my career came about several years ago when I was fortunate enough to undertake cadaver training supported by Galderma. When I finally stopped the scalpel from shaking in my hand and watched the calm demonstration from Dalvi Humzah, I was staggered by the differences between what I saw and the anatomy books, and subsequently changed my injecting technique.

However, aesthetic procedures are medical and there is much more to them than injecting technique and anatomy. Outside of the clinical learning I have received, my biggest practice change came from one of the many opportunities provided by Merz Aesthetics—a session on consent delivered by a solicitor called Kate Hill. After the event, I rushed back to my clinic to make multiple changes to my assessment and consent documentation, and began to really process the concept of defensible decision-making in a vulnerable environment, without the support of a large organisation. It is something that aesthetic nurses are all aware of but do not always fully know to handle, which is why I look forward to revisiting this area at future events.

Undertaking the prescribing qualification has also been fundamental to running my business efficiently. It has allowed me to have a broader scope of practice and gave me more control over key operating functions. Just like many of my peers and colleagues, I have attended several large aesthetic conferences, both sponsored and self-funded. Undoubtedly, I have picked up some useful tips from these large venues and on occasions my interest was peaked sufficiently to seek further information on a topic; however, the impact these conferences had on my practice was limited. Having said that, I have to confess I would pay to attend any conference with Arthur Swift on the agenda.

The emerging picture is that the learning which has had most influence on my practice was from small peer-to-peer meetings. These were arranged around a specific topic to provide in-depth knowledge. The ones which stand out are several arranged by Merz and presented by established key opinion leaders in the medical aesthetics sector, such as cosmetic doctor Kate Goldie, whose generosity shines when sharing her knowledge and skill in small informal settings, always allowing for that ‘one more’ question.

Reference has been made to some big-name heroes but everyone needs local heroes too. I have a handful who have helped me greatly with elements of my practice. My go-to regulation guru has always been Cheryl Barton, and other experienced aesthetic practitioners, such as Heather Irvine and Stephen Hennessy, are often there to solve tricky patient problems, clinical or otherwise.

It is also clear that the majority of opportunities have been within my comfort zone of ethical practice. However, we are also business owners and we sometimes need to remember to boost ourselves in that area too. A good place to start for my business was Consulting Room’s Smart Ideas seminars.

As a final note, on re-reading this piece, it occurs to me it is almost a thank you list and for this I make no apologies. Perhaps we need to acknowledge and thank our colleagues more, giving them respect they have earned and deserve.

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