

Spas that offer minimally invasive procedures such as liposuction are becoming increasingly popular in the US, despite growing concern from many in the medical community

## Should surgery be performed in spas?

BY CAMILLE SWEENEY  
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK

There is little to suggest that the TriBeCa MedSpa in Manhattan is a medical facility, at least in the traditional sense. In the waiting area, called the Tranquillity Room, a waterfall cascades down one wall. A client may have a pedicure or facial before entering a softly lighted space where a plastic surgeon performs laser Fraxel treatment or some other minimally invasive procedure that would cost twice as much in a harried doctor's office.

TriBeCa MedSpa is one of 1,800 medical spas in the US, hybrid facilities that offer treatments like laser hair removal and liposuction alongside massages and other traditional spa fare. In recent years, the business has become a growth industry: From July 2007 to December 2008, the number of medical spas increased 85 percent, according to the International Spa Association, far outpacing the growth of day, destination and resort spas.

The kinds of procedures performed in medical spas has also increased. At the Park Avenue Medical Spa in Armonk, New York, for instance, clients who have undergone chemosurgery for skin cancer, which may leave the skin pitted, can receive reconstructive surgery, a treatment that falls outside the strictly aesthetic category and may point in the direction the industry is evolving.

"It certainly seems like the wave of the future," said Gerald Ginsberg, a cosmetic surgeon and medical director of the TriBeCa MedSpa, who noted that, increasingly, patients are becoming "customers" searching for the best deal in what he calls "today's medical emporia." All the more reason, in his mind, that it is important to enforce regulations "to ensure we're offering the best care for the best price."

In fact, despite the many well-regarded facilities like TriBeCa MedSpa, the rapidly growing industry is coming under increased scrutiny. Proposed legislation to tighten controls over the credentials of those who can own a medical spa; what procedures can be performed in such places; and how much training someone must have to perform particular procedures is making its way through several state medical boards, including those in Massachusetts, New York, Utah and Florida, where the death last month of a patient, Rohie Kah-Orukotan, is generating renewed concern.

On Sept. 25, Kah-Orukotan, a 37-year-old nurse, entered the Weston MedSpa in Weston, Florida, for a minimally invasive liposuction procedure to remove fat from her abdomen and thighs. During the treatment, she suffered seizures and never regained consciousness.

Michael Freedland, the family's lawyer, said she was

given Lidocaine and propofol, a drug that induces sedation and is believed to have contributed to the death of Michael Jackson.

The case, which is still under investigation, raises several issues that concern experts around the country. First, should the treatment — which may actually have been, by the state's classification, a more advanced, or Level II, liposuction procedure — have been performed at Weston MedSpa, which is licensed as an electrolysis facility, not a medical facility?

"We believe Mrs Kah-Orukotan received more than a minimally invasive Level I liposuction procedure in a setting that was inappropriate," Freedland said. In fact, a new rule before the state's board of medicine would not allow any surgical procedure that requires sedation to occur outside of a registered Level II surgery facility.

And then there is the question of the experience of the doctor who performed the procedure on Kah-Orukotan. Omar Brito Marin, a medical doctor with a specialty in occupational medicine, learned liposuction in a three-day intensive course, according to his lawyer, Brian Bieber, who said he believes no malpractice was committed in the case.

For some industry observers, the issue of training and experience is the cause for perhaps the greatest concern. Darrick Antell, a plastic surgeon in Manhattan, noted that all too

frequently someone who starts out performing one procedure migrates to another with only minimal experience. "Someone may start out doing laser hair removal, and next thing you know they're doing treatments for cellulite," said Antell, who said that personnel in medical spas are pushing the boundaries of what is allowed.

Wendy Lewis, an aesthetic surgery consultant and author of *Plastic Makes Perfect*, said: "The incident in Florida is nothing short of tragic, and I feel for that woman's children and family. But I say, buyer beware."

Such sentiment applies to another popular medical spa procedure: laser hair removal. For years, complaints of second- and even third-degree burns from laser hair removal procedures have been reported. Yet in places like New York state, it is still not considered a medical procedure, despite vigorous protests from many in the medical community.

"In New York, legally, even a barber could do it, not that he would," said David Goldberg, a cosmetic dermatologist in New Jersey, New York and Florida, as well as a law professor at Fordham University and a legal counsel to the Medical Spa Society.

In Massachusetts a medical spa task force has been set up to advise the state legislature on how best to regulate the facilities. "We are trying to set some standards here, yet make it



▲ Gyorgy Ivanics, chief surgeon at the Professo Clinic, in Budapest, marks the face of patient Vera Hegedus, prior to performing an aesthetic blepharoplasty, plastic surgery to correct baggy eyelids.

PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

flexible enough to accommodate rapid changes in the industry," said Russell Aims, chief of staff of the Massachusetts Board of Registration in Medicine.

"We don't want to say to the consumer, 'Don't go get these procedures done,' or to a physician that he or she can't profit from this potentially lucrative business, but I think it's around the time I saw a place offering walk-in Botox shots at a mall that I became concerned," Aims said.

"To me it's a lot like the mortgage industry," said Ranella Hirsch, a dermatologist in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and an advocate for more stringent regulations of medical spas. "While it may allow more

accessibility to treatments and procedures, it's also brought a much higher level of permanent injury," she said.

Hirsch added that she thinks a system of federal regulations of medical spas would be more cohesive than the current state-by-state model but believes that is unlikely to happen, since medical and other professional boards, like nursing, electrology and aesthetics boards, are regulated and licensed by individual states.

Despite all the safety and regulatory controversies concerning medical spas, there are thousands of satisfied medical spa customers. Among them is Gail Fox of Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, who went

to the Anushka Cosmedical Center Spa and Salon in West Palm Beach, for facial fillers that were administered by a nurse practitioner and found the experience "a pleasure." "The service was on sale so the price was right. That's what drew me in. The pace was slower than at my dermatologist's office. All my questions were answered, and I didn't feel pressured," Fox said.

"These places can offer a wonderful opportunity for a consumer to reduce stress and get treatment for the whole body," said Lynne McNees, president of the International Spa Association. But, she added, "just because someone is in a white coat, it doesn't mean he or she is a qualified to perform a procedure on you."

Both McNees and Hannelore Leavy, executive director of the International Medical Spa Association, emphasized the efforts their associations are making to educate the medical spa consumer. For instance, Leavy's organization has a section on its Web site that pertains to current legislation affecting medical spas.

"If someone is cutting you open or injecting something into you it's not a spa service, it's a medical one," McNees said. "You're going to need to know who is performing that procedure, know their credentials and accreditations and really do your homework," she said. "I tell everyone, 'If you don't know, don't go.'"

### [ BOOKS ]

## Nabokov's unfinished novel to be published next week

Before his death Vladimir Nabokov instructed that his final manuscript be destroyed, but his son Dmitri decided last year to defy his wishes

BY PAOLA MESSANA  
AFP, NEW YORK

Vladimir Nabokov wanted it burned on his death, but *The Original of Laura* survived and now, 32 years later, the unfinished novel is about to be published for the first time.

Despite Nabokov's dying wish, publication of the manuscript, which was compiled on index cards, is set for Nov. 17 in New York and London, giving what many hope will be an unexpected glimpse of his genius.

The Russian-born writer's widow Vera had already saved his most famous work, *Lolita*, from the flames, and their son Dmitri, 75, followed suit by preserving *Laura*.

Yet the family hesitated for

30 years before finally going to literary agent Andrew Wylie who negotiated a deal with Knopf/Random House in the US and Penguin in Britain.

The manuscript — 138 index cards — until now has been locked in a bank vault in Montreux, Switzerland, where Nabokov died in 1977.

Like *Lolita*, *The Original of Laura* is in English. The author was born in St Petersburg and emigrated with his family at the time of the 1917 revolution, but began to write in English from 1941.

The contents of the book are known only to a highly restricted circle including the family, but debate has raged for three decades over whether or not the author's

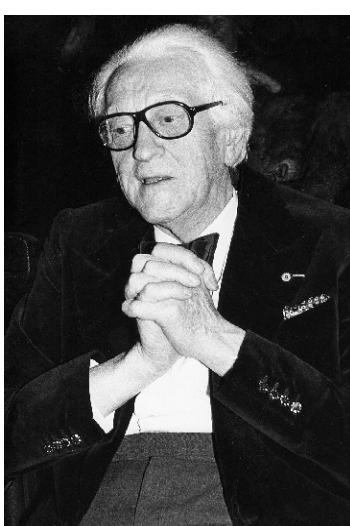
wishes should be respected.

"Dmitri made the right decision. Had his father wanted it destroyed, he would have done so himself," Gavriel Shapiro, Russian literature professor at Cornell University and an author of several books on Nabokov, said.

Shapiro noted that Nabokov, who taught at Cornell between 1948 and 1959, had also wanted to burn *Lolita*, the book that made him world famous in 1955.

"At one point, Nabokov wanted to destroy *Lolita*. He was on his way to the incinerator, but Vera stopped him."

Nabokov's wish to have his work destroyed was not the only case of literary self-sabotage. Franz Kafka asked his friend Max Brod to destroy all his unpublished



Vladimir Nabokov, who died in 1977, also wanted to burn the manuscript for his most famous novel, *Lolita*.

PHOTO: AFP

work, including *The Trial*.

But instead the book was published posthumously.

There has been huge speculation about the contents of *The Original of Laura* and its quality.

Shapiro, who met Dmitri Nabokov several times, is one of the few who have had a glimpse.

"I happened to read that book several years ago, with Dmitri's kind permission. I don't remember the details," Shapiro said, "but had Nabokov had the time to complete the novel, it could have been his crowning achievement."

Dmitri Nabokov has also alluded to the potential greatness of the book.

In a BBC television interview in 2008, he said, "My father told me what his most important books

were. He alluded to *Laura* as one of them. One doesn't refer to [a] book one intends to destroy.

"He would have reacted in a sober and less dramatic way if he didn't see death staring him in the face," Dmitri Nabokov told the BBC. "He certainly would not have wanted it destroyed. He would have finished it."

What is not clear is how polished the unfinished book is or whether it could fail to meet the high standards of already published Nabokov novels.

In an interview with the BBC, Vladimir Nabokov himself discussed his unusual writing methods and perhaps gave ammunition to those who say the text is not ready for publication. "I use these index cards, and

I don't write consecutively, from the beginning to the next chapter, till the end," he said. "I just sort of fill in the gaps."

The speculation is that the novel contains even more sex than *Lolita*, the story of an elderly, literary pedophile and a manipulative young girl.

Dmitri Nabokov says only that the story concerns a neurologist who has great intellect, but is physically unappealing, and contemplates suicide after becoming oppressed by his much younger wife's infidelity.

"Sex? Not much, that's not the point," he said.

Readers won't have to wait entirely until Nov. 17. An extract is to be published today — in *Playboy* magazine.