In PRACTICE

Featured Physician

Alexander S. Gross, M.D.

UNDERSTANDING THE KEY COMPONENTS TO A THRIVING PRACTICE IS WHAT MAKES THESE TOP LEADERS IN THEIR FIELD GREAT EXAMPLES FOR ACHIEVING SUCCESS

By Christine Lapointe, Contributing Editor & Advisor, & Laura Jackson, Aesthetics 360°

Practice Philosophy The Three "A"s

When Dr. Alexander Gross launched his primary dermatology practice almost 20 years ago, he did so with a basic philosophy for success. He adopted a mindset of The Three "A"s: Ability, Affability, and Availability. These core sensibilities are what Dr. Gross believes have set the ground work for sustaining his large and ever-evolving surgical and cosmetic dermatology practice.

- Ability - Having the necessary training and skills to deliver on patient expectations and promises made
- Affability - Making yourself and your team open to establishing a relationship with patients on a personal level - "bedside manner"
- Availability - Being obtainable and reliable as pertains to your patients' needs for attention and service

ABILITY

When it comes to ability, Dr. Gross practices what he preaches. He received a Bachelor of Science degree from Emory University and then attended medical school at the University of South Florida. He completed an internship and residency in internal medicine at Emory University and a dermatology residency and fellowship at Vanderbilt University. Dr. Gross is board certified in both internal medicine and dermatology.

In addition to his full-time practice at the Georgia Dermatology Center, Dr. Gross is an attending physician at Northside Forsyth Hospital. He volunteers his services to the community, and he also trains other physicians to perform tumescent liposuction and soft tissue filler injections. He is an Assistant Clinical Professor of Dermatology at Emory, a preceptor for the

Medical College of Georgia, and trains residents and students from these schools.

When we asked Dr. Gross what he sees is his greatest asset as a Surgical and Cosmetic Dermatologist, he said it has been in his ability to stay ahead of the curve and be amongst the first in his area to offer new and desired services. By staying in communication with many of the technology leaders and always striving to learn about new advancements and procedures, he can offer expert medical advice to his patients based on what is available and providing the best results. "The public is always interested in what is new, especially procedures that can be done with less down time and still offer great results." There may be five different procedures which address the same problem, but "ABILITY" or having the skill and experience to determine what procedure will offer the desired results weighed with risk, benefits, and down time is a key component to practice success. "The most important thing is matching which procedure is right for each individual patient."

We were interested to learn how a dermatologist comes to the decision to expand his focus to include both invasive and non-invasive cosmetic procedures. We were even more curious as to the challenge a dermatologist would face offering procedures which are typically performed by plastic surgeons. Dr. Gross explained how his decision came to be. His story really began when he completed his residency in 1991. He said, "I graduated with a full bag of tools for taking care of patients with acne, rashes, benign skin lesions, and skin cancer. There was very little in the area of cosmetic procedures being offered by dermatologists. At that time it was collagen injections and chemical peels. The only lasers available were used to treat warts."

TUMESCENT LIPOSUCTION

In 1994 Dr. Gross took a course in tumescent liposuction given by Dr. William Coleman, Clinical Professor of Dermatology at Tulane University. Dr. Gross noted that at that time, few dermatologists in the U.S. were performing tumescent liposuction. He believed cosmetic dermatology offered great opportunity for his practice and patients. Because Tumescent Liposuction offered the safety factors and decreased down time not available by traditional liposuction, the procedure was well received by his patients. Four years into his practice, Dr. Gross introduced Tumescent Liposuction in his clinic and continues to utilize this procedure today. It was a huge success. For every patient he treated, he would generate approximately "five" referrals.

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> ***– Alex Gross, M.D.***

CO_2 RESURFACING

Next came the entrance of Carbon Dioxide Laser resurfacing. After attending the first resurfacing training course in Atlanta on carbon dioxide laser resurfacing, Dr. Gross was literally one of the first doctors in Atlanta to offer the procedure. Again, always striving to be ahead of the curve. As an expert in the "care of skin," this procedure was a natural transition for him and increased his desire to become even more involved in the cosmetic arena. His current medical patients were again lining up to enhance the appearance of their skin.

While the procedure had wonderful results,

Dr. Gross saw a need for services with less down time and less risk. A common thread in these stories is that there were still very few doctors offering these services, and Dr. Gross was able to participate on the crest of the wave of cosmetic dermatology. And so, he has continued to listen and learn from his patients and peers and has been able to sustain a thriving practice offering medical expertise in everything from BOTOX® Cosmetic and fillers to laser skin rejuvenation, tightening, and long-term skin care programs.

We asked Dr. Gross, "If you were a derm surgeon starting out today, would you still recommend doing these procedures?" His response was insightful. "There are doctors now from all different specialties who are attempting to cash in on the cosmetic bonanza, so there is more competition when entering this arena.

"All of these practitioners have varied degrees of training. The competition is stiffer, but there are advantages to being a dermatologist." In dermatology, the patient base is already one who is concerned with his or her skin's past, current, and future condition. It allows for an easy opening discussion with patients regarding cosmetic procedures. "As a dermatologist, you are an expert in treating the skin so it makes perfect sense to offer services which can improve the skin's overall appearance."

AVAILABILITY

Dr. Gross's dynamic practice in Cumming GA remains a work in progress, having added a full service medical spa to his medical dermatology clinic in the late nineties. Today, his practice of cosmetic services ranges from facial and body treatments to tumescent liposuction. He continues to see anywhere from 30 to 40 patients per day on the pure dermatology side. To increase the availability for his clientele at the practice he has added a nurse practitioner and a physician's assistant along with two aestheticians.

Interestingly, according to the respondents of the Practice Profile Survey Report released by the American Academy of Dermatology in October 2009, of the average 34.3 hours per week dermatologists spent on patient care, only 2.8 hours or 8% of total hours are spent on cosmetic dermatology. Although more than half (59%) of dermatologists spend some time in cosmetic dermatology, 51% of these dermatologists spend less than 10% of their time performing cosmetic procedures. Less than 4% of the respondents reported performing liposuction or IV infusion of therapeutic medications.

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– Alex Gross, M.D.

While competing for clients is certainly a challenge these days, the numbers bear out that there remains a great opportunity with surgical dermatologists to expand their key services to include the cosmetic procedures so desired by their patients.

Before (left) and After (right) CoolLipo Treatment. Photos courtesy of Dr. Gross.

AFFABILITY

Being an expert in the skin is not the only aspect which can make a practitioner successful in a derm-based practice crossing over into cosmetics. You need to be able to determine what services and procedures will be best suited for the patient.

"If you ask the right questions, patients will tell you what they really want." – Alex Gross, M.D.

"Affability" is essential to making that personal connection with each patient. We asked Dr. Gross how he assesses his patients and determines the proper plan or course of services. He says photos are extremely important. Taking photos before and after and offering the patient a three-dimensional look at themselves is necessary. They are in the process of now placing a large high definition screen in house to use during consultations. By watching each client's reaction, explaining the down time and healing process, you are connecting with them as well as setting and managing expectations. "If you ask the right question, patients will tell you what they really want."

Before (top) and After (bottom) CoolLipo Treatment. Photos courtesy of Dr. Gross.

Before (top) and After (bottom) S-Lift Procedure. Photos courtesy of Dr. Gross.

Having the proper staff to engage with patients before, during, and after is another important ingredient. What is the winning combination when it comes to finding and training the right staff? Dr. Gross says there are some doctors who play a more intimate role in human resources while others leave it strictly up to the practice administrator. He prefers being involved. He believes it is important to see if there is a professional chemistry with potential employees during the interview process. Dr. Gross always checks references himself and asks questions about dependability, work ethic, and ability to get along with others. Most importantly, Dr. Gross believes it is his role to ensure his employees understand their work is important, and they are part of a team that is critical to insuring the success of the practice.

LOOKING AHEAD

Looking into the future, we discussed the plan for 2010 and beyond. Dr. Gross says dermatologists would benefit to look at all the new and exciting technologies available focused toward skin rejuvenation. Make it your mission to provide world class care. "We have been fortunate to have a thriving practice, but we cannot take this for granted. Providing 'The Three "A"s' of Ability, Affability, and Availability will be an ongoing mission for us. To distinguish ourselves from other people offering cosmetic procedures and to be seen as a leader in cosmetic dermatology, we will need to provide the best care, a higher standard of customer service, and foster long-term patient relationships. Being sensitive to our patients' needs is a standard we must hold steady."

Dr. Gross's extensive involvement and experience in the field of medicine has led him to many awards and honors. He was named the winner of the Dermatology Abstract Symposium at Vanderbilt University in June of 1990. Because of his dedication and work with The American Cancer Society, Dr. Gross was named Cancer Control Volunteer of the Year in 2008. He recently won the President's Volunteerism Award, and will serve on the Georgia Composite Medical Board, becoming Chairman July 1st of this year.

Dr. Gross continues to give back to the community with his time and is always available to speak with other medical professionals. To learn more about Dr. Alex Gross and his practice, please visit his website at www.gadermctr.com or contact him directly at axel144@aol.com.

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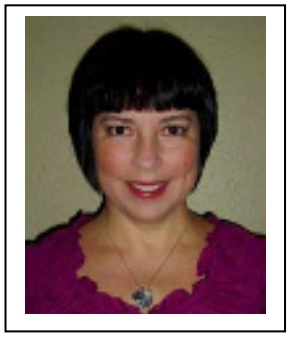

Ms. Jackson

Aesthetics 360° was founded and is owned and operated by **Christine Lapointe** and **Laura Jackson**. Together, they bring their clients over 40 years of Business Development and Sales and Marketing Experience from the elective surgery industry nationally and internationally. Their mission is to provide a comprehensive range of services vital to the support of Technology Leaders and Physician-owned practices on their journey to success.

Aesthetics 360° provides the systems and hands-on guidance necessary for practices to effectively measure results and target key areas for revenue growth from initial contact with a potential patient through long-term patient retention. Aesthetics 360° is the solution for technology leaders and practices that are committed to making business better. Contact them at 877.849.8216 or visit them on the worldwide web: www.aesthetics360.com.

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