

SURGE



AMERICAN ACADEMY
OF COSMETIC SURGERY



AMERICAN JOURNAL OF COSMETIC SURGERY:

REDESIGNED AND FULLY DIGITAL



A STROKE OF GENIUS:
Where Fine Art Meets
Cosmetic Surgery



INTERNATIONAL UPDATE:
Cosmetic Surgery
in Argentina

COSMETIC SURGERY IN ARGENTINA

Guillermo Blugerman, MD
Buenos Aires, Argentina



The story of cosmetic medicine in Argentina begins with the emergence of plastic surgeons in the early 1920s just after the World War I. To help understand the growth of this field in Argentina, it's important to understand how our health care system is structured, as well as our cultural views on cosmetic surgery. In regard to health care, the population has

maintained free access to public hospitals, thus allowing people with few economic opportunities to take advantage of aesthetic medicine and procedures at little or no cost. As a result, the doctors in Argentina tend to have good training in cosmetic surgery.

Cosmetic surgery, as we know it, came about through other specialties with the appearance of liposuction at the beginning of the 1980s. The new technique presented a more readily accessible entrée for many physicians of other specialties into this growing market. In 2005, we created the Argentina Association of Cosmetic Surgery (www.cirugiacosmetica.org.ar) to unite physicians dedicated to the specialty and to promote courses of specialization. At present, various specialties have entered the market of cosmetic surgery, mainly surgeons who perform rhinoplasties, ophthalmologists engaged in oculoplastics, mastologists in breast augmentation and gynecologists performing vaginal surgery, liposuction and breast augmentation. For now, dermatologists engage only in fillers and Botox. In comparison to cosmetic procedures, anecdotally plastic surgery accounts for 20-30% of the market.

What's also great about our culture is that cosmetic surgery is widely accepted. In fact, I was involved in a highly-rated prime time television program called "Transformations" that ran from 2004 to 2006. It was an Argentine version of "Extreme Makeover." This program helped tear down many myths and fears, as well as drive an increase in the number of cosmetic procedures in the country.

The aesthetic desired by most is a natural result, which does not appear artificial in any way. Having said that, we have recently seen an increase in the requested volume of breast implants. This is more than likely due to the globalization of aesthetic views and the pervasion of pornographic media depicting more exuberant women.

It's no surprise that given our culture's celebration of thinness that liposuction is the most popular cosmetic procedure, followed closely by silicone breast implants. The least popular continues to be cosmetogynecology surgeries. However, gynecomastia is growing in popularity, along with abdominoplasty due to Avelar technique and silicone implants in the buttocks. The latter is, of course, due to recent media coverage highlighting the perfect buttocks in everyone from Jennifer Lopez to Pippa Middleton.

In general, women in more populated cities openly discuss their procedures, whereas those in smaller cities continue to keep it a secret. As for the men, outside of the gay community, men hardly ever discuss their procedures. And the only negative attention paid to the field occurs when there are fatalities or serious errors and understandably so.

While the culture of Argentina ardently supports cosmetic surgery, practicing in this country doesn't come without its challenges. Legally, cosmetic surgery does not exist as a specialty in the Argentine Republic. As a result, if a surgeon is faced with a legal problem and is not a plastic surgeon, they may experience more difficulty with their case. To aid in this dilemma, we have instituted the first medical residency which includes cosmetic surgery within its education program at the National University of the Northeast (UNNE). This residency grants the title of plastic, reconstructive, aesthetic and cosmetic surgeon. UNNE's first graduates of this program will be in 2012.

The future of cosmetic medicine in Argentina looks bright. I don't see business waning any time in the near future – in fact, quite the opposite. Cosmetic surgery remains very popular, creating a large market for doctors. There is usually sufficient work for all. In Argentina, image is very important especially in regard to success in the labor market. Even in times of deep economic crisis, our patients never cease to visit us for procedures. If our patients are any indication, we believe the market will continue to grow. People are also gradually relying more and more on the capabilities and experience of their doctors rather than the titles that they have. At the moment, it is a good business, despite the fact that malpractice lawsuits within this industry are rapidly increasing. What is needed is legislation covering these practices to protect cosmetic surgeons and their patients alike. ■