

A Makeover Business

By Sarah Thornton



Lara Molloy and Sue Edwards



Appearance medicine is not as intensely private as it used to be says Lara Molloy of Peak Appearance.

Looking good is big business. There has always been a thriving beauty therapy industry here but during the past decade, appearance medicine has taken off in Hawke's Bay and at last count, there were seven clinics dotted around Hastings and Napier.

Appearance medicine or non-invasive cosmetic medicine as it's also referred to, offers both skin treatments and appearance enhancements. Fillers and Botox sit alongside IPL hair removal and mole surgery. Even excessive sweating can be dealt to in an appearance medicine clinic. It's a common misconception that appearance medicine is restricted to beautification and contrary to popular opinion, not everyone who walks out of a clinic looks like Joan Rivers.

Beauty industry stalwart Anna Jepson introduced appearance medicine services into her Urban Retreat business nearly three decades ago, when it was very much in its infancy here. Since then, dedicated skin clinics like Caci, Appmed House and Peak Appearance have emerged and have become very successful businesses, despite some having been established during the recession.

In 2007, Lara Molloy opened Peak Appearance in Havelock North. "The global financial crisis was in full swing but the business grew steadily. I think to a large extent it's a recession proof service as people still want to look good, but not in a flashy way with new cars or clothes. Having a treatment is a great confidence boost for people who are going through a tough time," she says.

Lara, a qualified nurse, believes appearance medicine can be "life transforming". She was born with a cleft lip, which took years of plastic surgery to remedy. Through her own "plastic journey" and her work as a theatre nurse and an international flight attendant, Lara felt well placed to establish her own clinic in Hawke's Bay, where she had relocated from Auckland in 2004 to join her partner.

"We started out with only 10 clients so took out a full page ad in the Hawke's Bay Today, which kicked things off and set us on our path. Now 80 percent of the business is from repeat or referral clients and I have five staff."

Julia Toy opened her first Caci clinic in Napier in 2007. She had been working in Palmerston North for an international cosmetic company and was looking to set up a business. Although Julia didn't have any medical experience, the

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– Lara Molloy

Caci franchise model appealed and fitted with her knowledge of the beauty industry.

"I did a lot of research on Caci before I bought the franchise. It's a very powerful brand that has 20 years of research and development supporting it. Caci is at the forefront of appearance medicine and skincare in New Zealand," she says.

In 2011, Julia opened Caci in Havelock North to satisfy customer demand and now manages 12 staff across both locations. The Napier clinic is particularly successful and has featured in the company's 'Top Awards' several years running.

Caci's head office runs the marketing and social media activity for all 30 of its franchises, although each location can run their own promotions, albeit with tight guidelines from head office.

Like Lara, word of mouth and repeat clients drive Julia's business. It is helped by the fact that in the past 10 years, appearance medicine has become more mainstream and less clouded in secrecy.

"It's not as intensely private as it used to be," says Julia. "People discuss their treatments more openly now and although for some it still has a level of mystique, it's certainly more acceptable as a practice."

And it's not just women who are walking through the clinics' doors. Men are also big users of appearance medicine and not only office-bound suit wearers are making appointments. Farmers, forestry workers and builders want to look good and "sort their skin out" with services such as microdermabrasion, IPL light therapies and skincare regimes. Men now account for around 10 percent of Peak Appearance's business and the number is increasing all the time.

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Julia Toy of Caci Clinic



Inside a Caci treatment room



Caci Clinic Havelock North

Although appearance medicine is enjoying more awareness and it appears business is thriving, there is concern about a trend emerging here of 'cowboy' operators using non-approved products on their clients, often with disastrous results.

Injectables are the money maker in an appearance medicine business. They are a high value, luxury item and in New Zealand, Allergan is the approved Botox manufacturer and supplier. According to my research, there are clinics in Hawke's Bay that import what is often referred to as "Chinatox", an inferior, cut-price product that has not been approved by the medical safety council and its use poses risks to clients. The use of these products also has the ability to impact negatively on people's understanding of how appearance medicine works and the kind of results to expect from a Botox or filler treatment. Unfortunately this also has the potential to reflect badly on the industry as a whole.

Cowboys aside, for Lara and Julia and the other equally professional and reputable appearance medicine clinics in Hawke's Bay, the focus is definitely on providing top-class skin and appearance enhancing treatments by experienced and qualified staff. And they've worked hard creating a good business out of looking good.

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