More men turning to plastic surgery, says Del Mar doctor

By Janice Coy

With the pressure to keep up with younger colleagues in a competitive job market, more men are counting on plastic surgery or other cosmetic procedures to turn back the clock, according to Dr. Scott Barttelbort, chief of plastic surgery at Scripps Memorial Hospital of La Jolla.

Three of his male patients concur that recent work on their faces whether in the form of botox injections, liposuction, chin implants or a facial rejuvenation has given them the "fresher look" they feel they need to stay competitive.

"I need to keep working. I'm not going to retire anytime soon," said one patient, a 64-year-old physician, who got a mid-face lift. "I needed to look a little younger."

A 40-year-old sales manager, who receives botox injections, said, "I have to keep up with the 27 and 28 year olds in the sales office. It definitely has made me look younger."

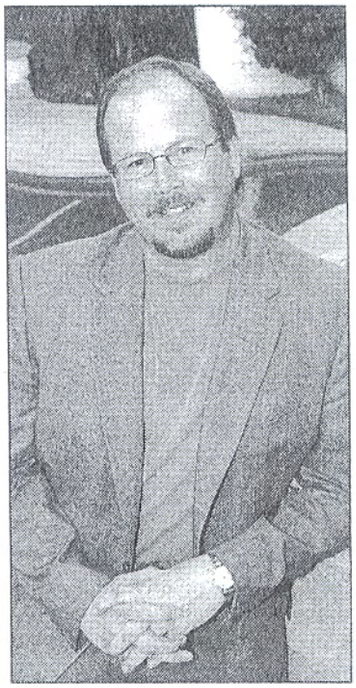
Although women still vastly outnumbered men in the number of cosmetic surgical and non-surgical procedures performed in 2002, men had more than 800,000 procedures done, according to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery. Figures from the American Academy of Plastic Surgery show that the percentage of men having cosmetic procedures has increased by 10 percent in the past three to four years with the most popular procedures including eyelid surgery, liposuction, nose reshaping and male breast reduction.

In addition, the numbers of men having botox injections or chemical peels have increased by 25 percent since 2001, according to American Society of Plastic Surgeons.

Barttelbort, a Del Mar resident, also attributes the growing number of men choosing cosmetic procedures to an increased awareness of the different and new techniques that are currently available as well as a gradual evolution in how men think about their appearance.

For example, he said, his dad wore glasses with a serviceable black frame, but today most men who wear glasses look for a frame that makes a fashionable statement about them.

"We want to have a look or appearance that is consistent with who we think we are," he said. Forty-eight years old himself,



Barttelbort said he would consider plastic surgery for himself when he begins to lose facial definition.

Many of his male patients are physically fit, he said, and have found that their bodies look younger than their faces.

"A lot of people can work out and maintain their weight and maintain a good muscle tone and keep their bodies in pretty good shape," Barttelbort said, "but when the skin stretches and loses its elasticity and the muscles in the neck begin to separate, you get the little, turkey gobbler effect.

"There's nothing you could do in terms of a workout or diet or exercise that's going to change that."

The 64-year-old patient said, "I've always been physically fit and working hard at keeping myself in good condition. I just wanted the face to be not as aged as it really was.

"I wanted to match the two up, body and face."

After taking a two-week vacation for the mid-face lift, the patient said he returned to work looking younger without a significant nasal fold, lines running from his nose to the side of his mouth, and drooping jowls.

When people find out how old I am, they don't believe it," he said. "I turned the clock back a little bit. I'm really glad I did this."

Barttelbort said most of his male patients who are in their 30s or early 40s are coming in for botox and facial treatments, "sort of a maintenance." Men in their mid- to late 40s and up are wanting liposuction, he said, while men in their 50s and older are coming in for the more major facial surgeries. To camouflage facial surgery, many men grow facial hair such as a mustache, a goatee or sideburns, Barttelbort said.

The routine average guy is interested in liposuction," he said. "One of the most common areas men want treated is love handles on the side or the development of a small amount of breast tissue." Power assisted liposuction has proven to be helpful in removing men's fibrous fat, Barttelbort said.

The 40-year-old sales manager heads to Barttelbort's office every three to four months to receive botox injections in his forehead and around his eyes. It's a procedure that hurts, but it is pain he said he is more than willing to endure because of the results.

Motivated by a video he saw of himself and by an older man at the office who looked "unbelievable" after his own botox treatments, the sales manager started going for botox injections more than three years ago.

"I looked like a Sharpei from the eyes up," he said, "otherwise I'm a youthful person with lots of vigor. I look better (now) I know I do, so why not? I'm going to keep doing it. It's a no-brainer."

People have commented on how well he looks, but just think he is getting more rest, he said. He vows not to stop until he so old he doesn't care anymore how he looks.

A third patient, a 49- year-old in radio broadcasting, had two surgeries performed by Barttelbort. The first, in March 2002, was to fix his eyes so he wouldn't "always look like somebody punched me" and to perform liposuction on his cheeks. The second, done six weeks ago, was a chin implant to give him more definition.

Losing a significant amount of weight before each surgery probably fooled most people into thinking his weight loss had just caught up with his face, the patient said.

"I feel great," he said. "I'm tackling the world.

"Some people might say it (the surgery) was a mid-life turning point, but to me it was time to do something for myself. Three or four years ago, I would not have wanted to spend discretionary money that way, but I finally realized that's what the money is for.

You work hard your whole life. You think, I don't have to have this (look). It can be taken care of in a simple procedure."

Barttelbort said his goal for all of his patients is that three months after surgery they will look him in the eyes and say, "Doctor, I'm glad I did it."