

AESTHETIC MEDICINE

How I started in aesthetics

Thinking of entering aesthetic medicine? Then follow our top ten tips from an entrepreneur who has just done it – **Dr Rajveer S. Thethi** (right)



AFTER RECENTLY shifting from a pure NHS background to working in aesthetic medicine, I found it to be both a steep and stimulating incline for my learning.

I have stumbled along, had tremendous self-doubt and found some success and some failures.

Independent Practitioner Today asked me to share some of my thoughts to save you time, energy and money if you are thinking of going into this area – and to make the right decisions at the start.

Here are my top ten tips. I have confidence you will enjoy them and they may be useful if you are purely considering aesthetics, have just started or even if you are more established.

1 Find the right course for you

Starting out in aesthetic medicine, you will soon discover the amount of choice you have can become overwhelming. There are course providers up and down the country delivering a vast range of workshops and training.

There are the standard combined Botox and dermal filler training days, the separated days for toxin and filler training, the one-to-one courses and everything in-between.

One thing you must understand is that in aesthetics, although you are still answerable to the GMC, there are no formal regulations, no overarching body and no one to uphold any professional conduct in the field.

Given these facts, there are many 'training schools' popping up with minimal experience and normally no formal teaching or training accreditation. So be alert! Do your research thoroughly and pick the course that is right for you. Look at:

- The student to trainer ratio;
- How many models are injected in one day?
- Are there live models? Some just inject dummy heads.
- Do you get a manual?
- Do you need to bring your own model?
- Will the organisers provide any take-home kit?
- Can you take 'before and after' pictures of your models?

Of course, price is also an important issue that should not

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be ignored. Just because a course is expensive does not mean you are going to necessarily get superior training.

Some large providers of training treat their students like cattle, herding you between rooms with exceptionally large student-to-trainer ratios. The syringes of Botox get passed around and you all share one to two injection points each – overall a rather underwhelming educational experience.

2 Choose your working environment carefully

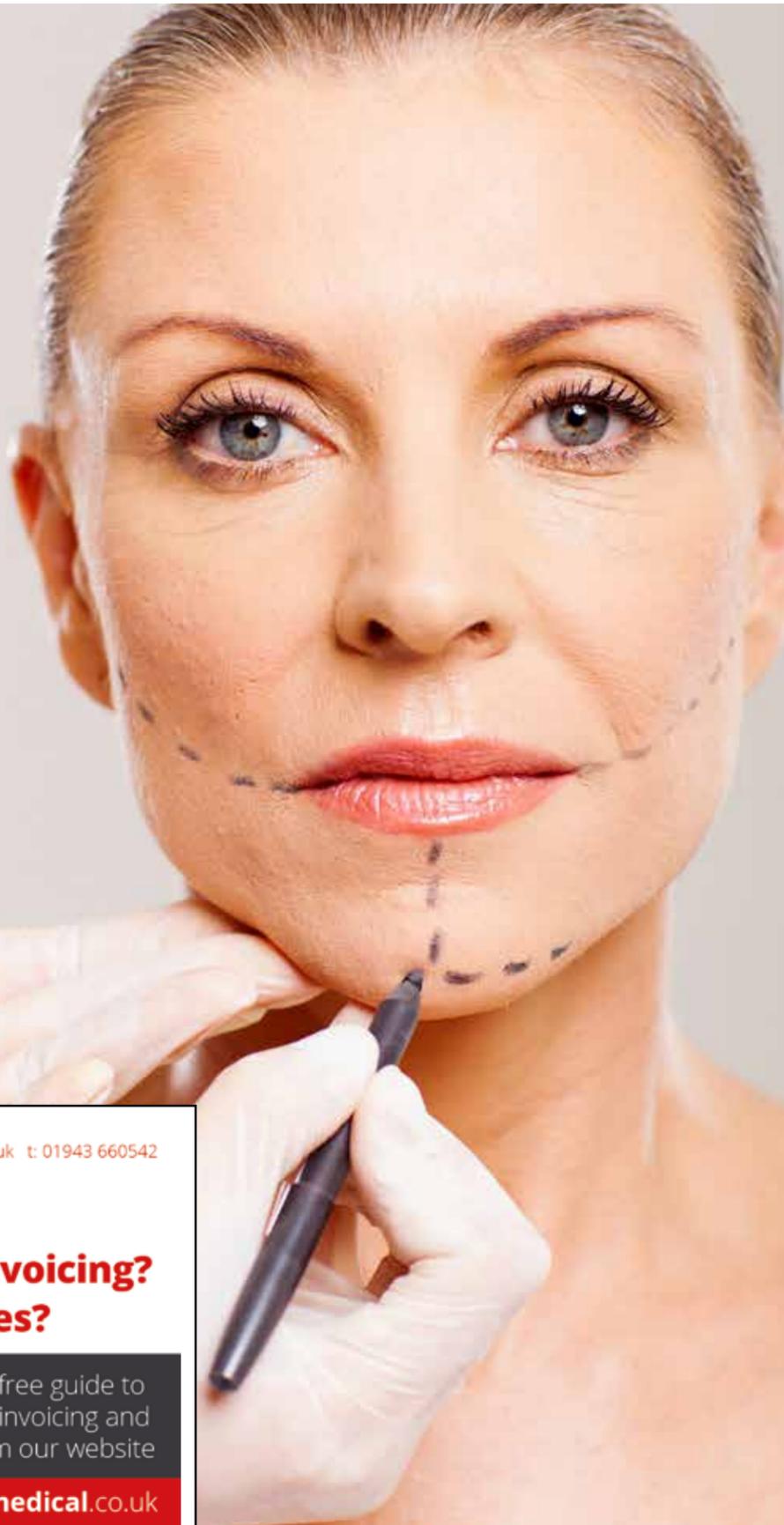
There is no right or wrong answer here. Doctors, nurses, dentists, dental therapists, dental hygienists, paramedics and soon beauty therapists are all in this game and want a slice of the cake just as much as you.

Patients want discretion, privacy and so a lot of my colleagues have opted to go mobile. This means they work from various locations including salons, hairdressers and even people's homes. This is very common practice.

As a healthcare practitioner who is used to scrubbing up to remove a skin tag, I found the concept of strolling into a patient's home to fill their lip a bit distasteful. But it happens and it happens a lot.

Make sure you know where you are going and tell someone the address if you decide to make this part of your practice.

Put simply – you can be either clinical or not. There is not really any middle ground. Opening a dressing pack onto a cat fur-ridden sofa, is not 'clinical', so make sure you have the right kit on board.



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Salons can range from being high-end boutiques to complete wastelands, so make sure you know what you are signing up for before you agree to anything.

I hire a clinical premise for all my procedures, therefore it is clean, reputable and clinical and just being in that environment gives me an edge over my competitor.

3 Get your first patients sorted early

I mention this from my own experience. I spent so much time contemplating what my course was going to be like and the techniques I need to understand that I completely forgot about the reason I wanted to do it: the patient.

I walked away from the course raring to go. Sadly, I had not planned for the next step – finding a patient and getting my kit ready. I needed to find someone quickly who was willing to let me stick needles in their face for free or cost price.

This task is easier said than done, as most people want some assurance of your experience before you approach them with a 27-gauge needle.

I am fortunate in that my training provider, for a completely reasonable price, provided me with a suitcase containing all my essential kit ready for collection on the day of my training course. So many quirky items that I would never have associated with aesthetic medicine, including a small pair of pliers.

Finding these items separately would not only have been expensive but extremely time-consuming. Hence, I would opt for the lazy doctor's route and buy a kitted suitcase. Then your only job is to organise the actual toxin, filler, insurance, premises and find a victim.

Do not leave it too long or your skills will fizzle out and there are too many stories of people doing these courses and never getting started.

4 Do not underestimate the time you need

Coming from the NHS into the world of aesthetics, there is some naivety in us all. You see these big corporate clinics turning over millions and see these happy patients

and you can quickly think: 'I could do that.'

Unfortunately, it just is not that simple. The clinics that you see doing so well and the people flaunting all their 'before and afters' on social media have had to work at it. Piece by piece, chipping away, day and night. And, unfortunately, all that hard work is quickly overlooked by those joining the industry.

Expect it to be tough, expect to have to work hard and expect yourself not to be stable and content for at least the first two years.

Looking back with hindsight, I struggle to comprehend the amount of challenges I have had to overcome along the way.

5 Stay medical; don't get lazy

I am a true supporter of the camp that my NHS training has paved for my good practices that I wish to carry through to my aesthetic career. This means stick to things you know work.

With more unexpected entrants into the aesthetic community daily, you need to stand out.

Becoming a doctor was not easy – we all know that and working as a doctor to strict ethical code, regulation, guidelines and clinical governance becomes a part of your practice. Do not forget that when you enter aesthetic medicine.

I too frequently observe people just jabbing faces like it is a slab of meat. Anatomy is only one of the buggers. Know your anatomy inside out. There is no excuse. Even cannula work can do a lot of damage if you do not know the locations of the branches and facial nerve.

Other areas such as documentation, audit, teaching, keeping up to date and patient feedback are important to consider. It is fundamentally about self-improvement and that needs emphasising in this industry.

In the NHS, if you are struggling to manage a patient, you would refer to a specialist in that field. You would not try to fix a neck of femur fracture in the GP clinic with matches and yarn, and I strongly believe the same ethical principles apply within aesthetic medicine.

MENTOR'S ACCOLADE



Dr Thethi's coach, Pam Underdown, chief executive at Aesthetic Business Transformations, says:

'I have loved every moment coaching and mentoring Dr Raj and seeing how much he has grown in just a few months.'

'From the moment we first spoke, not only could I tell how determined he was – and is – to make a success of his new business, but how coachable, open and willing to learn he is.'

'In addition to having the right attitude, it is critical for me to know that Raj was going to take action and implement everything he learns. His burning desire to learn the business and marketing side of private practice will ensure that he doesn't make the expensive mistakes that others can and do make.'

'Raj has fitted into our private coaching group extremely well and, due to this, he has had a huge range of help and support not only from me, but from the whole group of experienced aesthetic practitioners. I am really looking forward to seeing this rising star continue to grow and shine.'

6 Find support wherever you can

I underestimated the power of having support and how it improved my practice in the beginning. Support can be gained through so many channels and, trust me, you are going to need them all.

Your aesthetic medicine journey is a marathon and you are going to struggle working alone for such a great length of time. Hence, make sure you have someone there with you: a business partner, close colleague or a spouse.

Have someone you can trust to give the right advice, because the wrong decisions initially can become costly mistakes to rectify later.

Another powerful support system are the online social media forums.

On Facebook, there are multiple, national, UK-specific aesthetic forums where the big names in the industry are all within messaging distance.

Frequently, if there is a complication or a question, leaving a

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query on the forum will mean you get floods of positive, useful information back from people with a lot more experience, who have been where you are and made the same mistakes.

However, be aware that, nowadays, everybody is an expert if they write 'in my opinion' at the end of a statement. Do not follow blind advice and make sure you are getting it from a reputable source.

Some of the training providers have secret online forums with a closed aesthetic community. These can be amazing places to absorb knowledge and I advise you to find training providers with a forum already live and running, as you can join a community.

They not only help with your clinical work, but these forums can also tackle all aspects of the job, including the business side too.

7 Re-invest and do not stop learning

So, you have done your foundation course and treated your first patient. Now what?

It seems many practitioners feel now they have achieved the goal they can take their foot off the accelerator.

Unfortunately, this is the perfect time to quickly realise how little you actually know from a foundation course. You need to take any funds generated from your handfuls of patients, suffer the losses and re-invest that money – plus a lot more – into more courses.

A patient is not going to come to you if all you do is fill a nasolabial fold. You need to start to think pan-facially and these concepts of advanced facial analysis only come with further training and experience.

You need to get to the point I am approaching now, that when I sit on a train and look across at



Dr Raj Thethi and his wife and business partner, Dr Sharan Thethi, at their Leeds clinic

another commuter I can make a lengthy aesthetic plan of all the things I can improve with their face.

As a medical student, I used to look at their hand veins and guess who I would be able cannulate. Now I am tracking the route of their facial artery and trying des-

perately not to mentally cannulate it.

8 Get a business coach

You've only just started, you do not have the capital or the patient flow and a coach is quite costly. But, coming from an NHS background, I know I do not have

the slightest idea how to run a business.

This is where you need to become savvy and start switching your subconscious to a business mode. When I first started, I was basically handing out discounts, making everyone's third aunt twice removed my best friend and giving them 'mate's rates'.

After acquiring one of the best aesthetic business coaches in the UK – Pam Underdown, head of Aesthetic Business Transformations – I have quickly discovered the error of my ways and, more importantly, how to correct them.

Another good tip from my coach is to spend all car journeys listening to business and self-growth audiobooks. This has meant I have developed so much in so little time.

I am learning concepts in business I did not even know existed and have started actioning these changes in my own business. My coach has opened so many doors for me in the aesthetic world that I would not have even fathomed sat alone at my desk by myself.

My network within the aesthetic community has grown tenfold with her introductions of past colleagues. My business aside, I have also grown significantly as a person while having her support and guidance.

9 Do not pay attention to the competition

I did this a lot at the start. I would spend my days looking at competitors' websites, looking at their flyers, their prices and treatments.

Another thing I learned from my business coach is that this is your race and your race alone.

Diverting your time and energy spent looking at the competition towards something constructive for yourself and your business will make you feel less anxious, stay in more control and it will further your own business and your drive.

Focus on gaining experience more than anything. If you are not getting complications, it means you are not doing enough procedures. No race is won looking sideways at the competition. Look onwards and upwards...

10 Get clued-up. Regulation is coming

This is a sore topic to end on but one that will carry a lot of weight in the next few years.

If you are not already aware, after Sir Bruce Keogh's 2013 report *Review of the Regulation of Cosmetic Interventions*, key recommendations have been flagged which will shape the way the industry evolves.

With rumours of Level 7 supervision and GMC-approved specialist registers, there is currently a lot of smoke in the arena which will take a while to clear before we see the beast before us.

With acceptance of beauty therapists into the aesthetic circle from the Government and creation of the Joint Council for Cosmetic Practitioners, there is a paradigm shift ahead. It will change the way we view our roles and the way in the public views us.

You will be warned that regulation is coming from all angles, but no one really knows yet what that means. Who will regulate what and how these pieces of a complex jigsaw from three different boxes are even going to come together – no one knows.

Do not look at the beauty therapists as your competition or something to get worked up over. Concentrate on your business and your self-growth.

You are a medical professional and no one can take that away from you. Work hard, keep your head down, focus on your goals and good luck. It is an amazing journey you are embarking on. Enjoy the ride! ■

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