

# Skin Deep Rises to the Top

By Andrea Sercu

Medical esthetic leadership and a bulletproof business model place Skin Deep Laser Medspas in Pasadena and Encino, California, among the most comprehensive medical esthetic and surgery centers in the country. Founder and CEO, Colin Hurren, and his partner and medical director, Saul Berger, MD, explain what makes medical esthetics attractive to them and how they have made their business venture a success.





Photo: Bruce Ayda



Two years ago, Colin Hurren, founder and CEO of Skin Deep Laser Medspa, knew little about the medical spa industry. His interest lay in helping to turn around businesses in financial trouble. It wasn't until he took on a skincare company as a client that he understood this industry's huge potential and the benefits it could afford aging baby boomers. He set out to find a top medical director, the right marketing mix and a staff that could deliver superior customer service. He was successful and his efforts were well rewarded. While Hurren expected to break even in 18 months, the medical spa met that goal in a mere three months.

Colin Hurren lends his business acumen to Skin Deep Medspas. ▼



Photo: Bruce Ayda

And that's only the beginning. Today, as this 3,600-square-foot Pasadena, California, medical spa enters its second year of operation, business is doubling, and the Skin Deep team is on track to open a second location in Encino this month that includes a surgical center as well as comprehensive medical aesthetics.

### Medical Leadership

Like Hurren, Saul Berger, MD, a distinguished board-certified plastic surgeon known for his highly specialized breast reconstruction procedures and reduced-incision face-lifts, had also been considering exploring the medical spa business. Unlike some physicians, he wasn't looking for

a quick revenue producer or an exit from messy insurance entitlements. Instead, he saw an opportunity to expand his clinical exposures and enhance those areas that were related to, but not commonly addressed by, his current plastic surgery practice.

"I came at this because I wanted to develop better quality services," says Berger, who received his training at the University of Southern California and has been practicing medicine in California for more than 15 years. "I had noticed a number of trends that made me feel I could provide valuable services in addition to just high quality surgery. Many of my face patients were still in need of skin enhancements beyond the operations. I knew my eyelid or face-lift surgery wasn't going to be able to address their sun damage, for instance."

When the two men met through a CEO of a local hospital, they recognized the synergy in their philosophies and goals at once. "Our values and what we wanted to achieve in this business were very similar," says Hurren. "He's very much like me in that he has high standards and is a workaholic."

Hurren's savvy business sense and Berger's unflinching drive for medical excellence have quickly propelled Skin Deep Laser Medspa in Pasadena and the newly created Skin Deep Aesthetic Center in



Photo: Brooke Ayala

◀ Saul Berger, MD, saw opening a Medspa as an opportunity to expand his services to patients.

*What clients won't find at either Skin Deep facility are pampering day spa treatments.*

Encino, California, to prominence in the medical spa world.

Of the approximate 600 medical spas and estimated 12,000 day spas nationwide (as estimated by the International Spa Association), Skin Deep Aesthetic Center holds the distinction of being among the few facilities with a hands-on plastic surgeon who will preside full-time over an integrated surgical and medical aesthetics outfit, complete with intense pulsed light (IPL) treatments, chemical peels, aesthetic surgery and specialized surgeries, such as advanced breast reconstruction for breast cancer patients.

“Many medspas have an affiliation with plastic surgeons where the work is done in a separate office or hospital. Here, we have an integrated medical aesthetics and surgical outfit where everything is under one roof,” says Berger. “I revel in the fact that I have nurses who have lunch with estheticians and the operating staff. The whole thing is about having a unified family rather than a fragmented operation.”

Because the medical director will be on the premises full-time, clients visiting the new 6,800-square-foot facility can take advantage of Berger’s virtually pain-free Restylane (Medicis Aesthetics, Scottsdale, Arizona) lip enhancements; endoscopically guided, scar-free breast enhancements; and his creative uses of Botox (Allergan, Irvine, California) for brow arching and as a corrective for depressed lip lines.

One of the first in the region to work with photodynamic therapy, Berger is also able to offer clients of both Skin Deep facilities these cutting-edge procedures, which combine the photosensitizing topical Levulan (DUSA Pharmaceuticals, Wilmington, Massachusetts) with light energy to treat the signs of sun damage and acne.

What clients won't find at either Skin Deep



Photo: Brooke Ayala

▲ Two attractive consultation rooms allow staff to educate prospective clients on Skin Deep’s services.

facility are pampering day spa treatments. “I drew the line at massages, pedicures and manicures,” says Hurren. “We’re a medical facility in a spa-type environment with outstanding customer service but, at the end of the day, we’re still providing professional medical treatments. You have to know what business you’re in and focus on that.”

### Training Rules

One of the behind-the-scenes systems that set this operation apart from others is the intense selection,

Nurses and estheticians at Skin Deep are rigorously trained to provide top-notch education and care. ▼



*"We're a medical facility in a spa-type environment with outstanding customer service."*

scrutiny and training of Skin Deep's staff. Regardless of how much previous training they've received, every registered nurse and aesthetcian hired must pass a probationary period and receive hands-on training from the medical director before administering a single treatment.

"We won't sign off on anybody just because she's gone through a course and received certification. They have to pass my muster, too, because we have too much at stake in terms of the quality of our treatments," Berger says. Although he concedes that finding good staff members is not an easy task, he has the advantage of working with many nurses in

operating rooms and clinics, and has had good success in recruiting some of the best as employees. He has also found good staff members through referrals from colleagues he trusts.

Hand-picked, intensely trained staff members allow Skin Deep to offer excellent client education that focuses on selling clients on the benefits of buying treatment series rather than individual services. "That's a key strategy for Skin Deep," says Hurren.

In return, the aestheticians, registered nurses, client managers and medical director on staff at Skin Deep enjoy the benefits of full-time employee

All Skin Deep services are covered by strict protocols. ➤

status. “I believe if you’re going to provide this kind of quality service, you need to be willing to put the proper resources into their training and growth,” says Hurren.

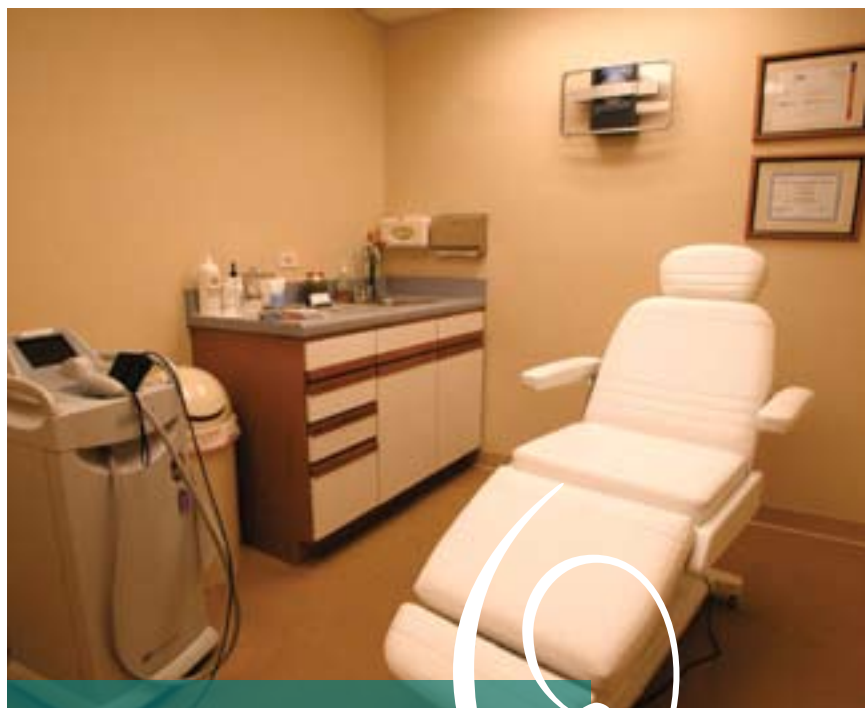
## Marketing That Works

While Berger grapples with the constant challenge of finding good medical staff, Hurren finds the biggest challenge of the industry lies in attracting clients. “Sixty percent of this business is about marketing,” he says. “You can spend a lot of money on paid advertising and see few results, so it’s about finding the right marketing mix, the right message as a whole—not just about placing an ad.” Skin Deep has met that challenge with a blend of public relations, newspaper advertising, direct mail pieces that target events such as a successful open house in September 2004 and an effective cross-promotion with a high-end Pasadena gym. For example, the medical spa took its gym cross-promotion to the public with a newspaper ad that treated those who came into the spa for a free skincare consultation to a free one-week pass at the gym.

In the beginning, Hurren wanted to convey a quality, upscale spa image in print, but he knew that if he didn’t advertise his prices, potential clients would be scared off by a perception that the services were unaffordable. So he took the bold move of printing a mini menu with the spa’s competitive pricing in newspaper ads.

“First, you have to provide first-class treatments and outstanding customer service, but you also have to provide them at a competitive price,” he notes.

Out of all the marketing options available to Skin Deep, personal referrals have generated



*“You have to provide first-class treatments and outstanding customer service— at a competitive price.”*

the most business for the medical spa to date, says Hurren. “Good word of mouth is achieved by not just offering first-rate treatments and products and a comfortable environment, but also by providing a great experience for clients. That is done by making sure your staff is trained and motivated to engage with the clients. They’re not only walking away pleased with the outcome of their procedures, but they leave feeling like they’ve had an experience with lots of personal attention.”

## New Technology

While the ongoing advances in medical aesthetic technologies can make it tempting for any medical director or owner to purchase the latest innovations, Hurren and Berger limit their investments to equipment that has been proven effective through clinical trials and inside Skin Deep’s own treatment rooms.

“We tend not to jump into buying equipment that was, say, just approved by the FDA,” says Berger. “That’s a surefire way to end up with unused

◀ Skin Deep does offer patients mineral makeup to hide treatment side effects.



All treatments, from light therapies to fillers, are covered by strict protocols.

equipment. I'm always looking at the literature and passing relevant information on to the nurses in our practice, so they can take advantage of the latest findings."

All treatments, from light therapies to fillers, are covered by strict protocols. When manufacturers release new laser settings or filler guidelines, these are incorporated into the procedures to keep them up to date.

Interestingly enough, one of the most effective pieces of equipment and highest revenue producers in the Skin Deep mix actually doesn't make any money at all for the medspa, at least not directly. However, it certainly pays its way in referrals. Provided free to Skin Deep clients, a Photo Complexion Analysis and Consultation, using the VISIA (Canfield, Fairfield, New Jersey) pinpoints six indicators, including spots, pores, porphyrins (evidence of bacteria in the pores), wrinkles, evenness and UV spots, then gives a percentage for each indicator, show-

ing the client how she compares with others in her age group and skin type. Best of all, the consultation provides each client with a report offering tangible, visual data on these six indicators. While spots, UV spots and unevenness may point to a client's benefiting from an IPL treatment, a high rate of wrinkles often leads to Botox and fillers.

In the future, Berger expects to see more of the same technological trends the industry is currently experiencing, such as increased linkages between topical medications and light therapies. "That gets me very excited," says Berger. "I don't think it's going to stop with Levulan." He expects to see safer fillers with fewer side effects and better delivery of light energies as well.

Skin Deep will continue to focus on perfecting its medical aesthetic procedures with the emphasis placed on "quality of workmanship" as opposed to "revenue return."

"That's kind of our concept," Berger notes. "We feel it's really about putting together all the components the best we can without compromise." Both Berger and Hurren see only continued success for their medical spa model. ♣

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## Skin Deep Laser Medspa Menu

- Skincare options range from 50-minute deep cleansing facial (\$80) to a package of five pulsed-light rejuvenation treatments covering the face, neck and chest (\$3,000).
- Patients can choose a Photodynamic Acne Treatment with blue light only (\$65), blue light and Levulan (\$295) or IPL and Levulan (\$600).
- Hair removal treatments are available for every body part from the upper lip (\$75 or \$300 for a package of five) to full legs (\$450 or \$1,800 for a package of five).
- Botox injections (\$11 per unit) can be combined with Restylane injections (\$490 per syringe) in the Beautiful Lips Package, which enhances the fullness of the lips and gives the mouth a more youthful look for \$550.
- Vein removal is available for the face, neck, chest and legs (\$350 per 30-minute session).

For more information, check out the website at [www.skindeeplaser.com](http://www.skindeeplaser.com).