

# Dartmouth plastic surgery and dermatologists' offices thrive

Local doctors have seen an uptick in cosmetic and elective-based procedures amid COVID — here's why

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DARTMOUTH — While some businesses are struggling to remain open due to staff shortages and lack of business, plastic surgeons and dermatologist offices are booming with appointments.

In fact, most of the current clients and patients are those working from home who have found it convenient to recover from a procedure in the comfort of their own homes and behind face masks.

Dr. Albert Fox, a plastic surgeon whose practice is on Faunce Corner Road, said he has seen a strong uptick in facelifts, rhinoplasties and eye lifts, as those procedures require extended recovery time. The majority of his patients, between 40 and 50 percent, work from home. For those who continue to work in offices, many have used the excuse of wearing a face mask to hide swelling and bruising.

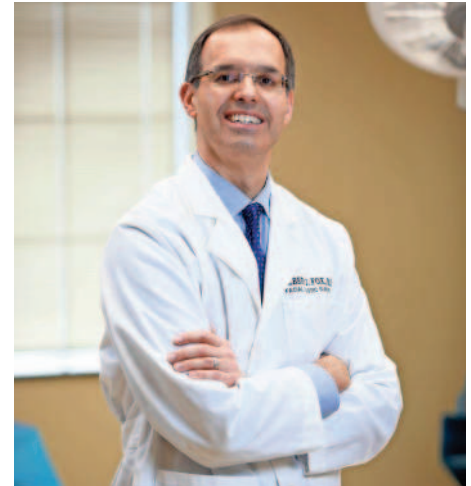
"It's counterintuitive," Fox said. "People are wearing masks, yet they want to have the procedures done."

Lori Bentley, medical aesthetician at Dartmouth Dermatology, noticed an increased interest in laser peels, also known as "lunchtime peels" because they are quick and easy appointments. Since COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted, she has seen a 60 percent increase in clients. With many of her clients working from home, she no longer has to schedule appointments around their work schedules.

"It's easier to fit into their lifestyle schedule," Bentley said.

## Masks hide recovery bruises

Similar to more intensive procedures, clients are able to hide behind a face mask during the recovery process. Laser peels that involve a V-beam can cause severe bruising to the skin. Bentley said prior to the pandemic, clients might take off the weekend to recover and hide any remaining traces with makeup. Now, patients have the option to turn off webcams during virtual meetings, so she is booking further out, something she never did before in her 20 years of work. Even with her regular clients, she's booking a few months in



**Dr. Albert Fox, facial plastic surgeon located in Dartmouth, has seen a dramatic increase in patients after COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, many of which work from home which helps with recovery.** SUBMITTED PHOTO

advance rather than one month out.

## Self-care amid so much heartache

Since the pandemic, Fox has noticed a trend: Many patients have decided to make cosmetic changes to their appear-

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# Surgery

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ance because it gives them control over their life, something that has been robbed from many individuals throughout the pandemic.

"There is a link between how you look and how you feel about yourself and your general well-being," Fox said. "Patients are discovering that if I take care of how I look and feel about myself, I take care of my entire being."

During follow-up appointments, Fox has noted that his surgery is the first step in the right direction of patients pursuing a healthier lifestyle through eating and exercising.

Bentley noted how clients may be spreading their finances to cover self-care. Instead of saving up for traveling and expensive trips, clients may be choosing to spend their income on procedures that make them happier and

more confident.

"There are less things in the world that are happy, and they know they will get a nice result which brings up their spirits," Bentley said.

## Adjusting to a post-pandemic practice

When COVID-19 first hit, medical offices took an initial blow. All medical appointments, especially cosmetic and elective-based procedures, were completely halted from the beginning of April 2020 into the summer. During this time, Fox continued to see patients for emergency issues and virtual consultations, something that was never introduced to his practice before the pandemic, although it was very common at larger practices in Beverly Hills, California. Fox began seeing new patients locally in southeastern Massachusetts, Rhode Island and even across the country through Zoom calls.

"It added a new dimension to the

practice," Fox said.

Once restrictions were lifted, Fox saw a surge in requests for appointments for fillers, Botox and surgery — and not just at his practice, as he heard the same from colleagues throughout the country.

"Patients took comfort in knowing they could still take care of themselves to look better and feel better," Fox said. "Working remotely, they had the opportunity to take care of things they've been wanting to take care of for a long time, recover from home and still work."

Currently, Fox's practice is booking appointments six to eight months in advance and the surgery calendar is completely filled.

For returning patients and clients, especially in older, more cautious populations, Fox noticed patients were holding off on Mohs reconstructive surgery for individuals with skin cancer. Over the past year, he has seen significant changes in skin cancer, especially cases that have gone untreated for so

long.

"Cancer doesn't follow a calendar, it continues to grow," Fox said.

Fox's practice offers both minimally invasive and invasive procedures, all on site as he has a fully accredited operating room in his small office. Patients are able to avoid larger hospital settings completely, something that has been appealing to many while the pandemic continues. He said his office has not suffered any staffing shortages.

Although she is the only aesthetician at Dartmouth Dermatology, Bentley doesn't feel overwhelmed by the increase influx of clients, but rather "very happy because it's job security" in an unprecedented time.

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