

## Severe Sagging of Facial Skin Associated With Two Genes

BY BRUCE JANCIN  
Denver Bureau

KYOTO, JAPAN — Facial sagging has been found to be a function not only of aging, gravity, and environmental and lifestyle factors, but also of genetics.

Melanocortin 1 receptor (MC1R) and elastin proved to be significantly associated with the sagging of facial skin in a genetic study of 530 white women age 44-70 years, Christiane Guinot, Ph.D., said at an international investigative dermatology meeting.

The MC1R gene plays a major role in skin pigmentation and sensitivity to sunlight. Elastin figures prominently in arterial wall elasticity. Neither gene had previously been linked to sagging of facial skin, said Dr. Guinot of the Chanel Epidermal and Sensory Research and Investigation Center and the University of Tours (France).

Dr. Guinot, who is president of the French Statistical Association, reported that 121 of the 530 women had severe sagging of the facial skin based upon a structured 0-10 rating scale. Non-genetic factors that proved significantly associated with severe facial sagging were age, being overweight or obese, and being menopausal and not on hormone replacement therapy (HRT).

An analysis that adjusted for these factors revealed that women carrying

two variants of the MC1R gene were at a 2.3-fold increased risk of severe sagging, compared with those with the wt/wt (wild type) genotype. Women with the Ser422Gly polymorphism of the elastin gene were at a 1.8-fold increased risk.

Overweight women were 1.7 times more likely to have severe facial sagging than normal-weight women; obese women were at 2.3-fold increased risk. Menopausal women not on HRT were an adjusted 2.1-fold



Women carrying two variants of the MC1R gene were at a 2.3-fold increased risk of severe sagging.

DR. GUINOT

more likely to have severe facial skin sagging than those on HRT.

Neither smoking status nor skin color was significantly associated with severity of facial skin sagging, although the spectrum of skin colors in this all-Caucasian study was limited, Dr. Guinot noted at the meeting of the European Society for Dermatological Research, the Japanese Society for Investigative Dermatology, and the Society for Investigative Dermatology. The study was sponsored by Chanel. ■

## States Eye 'Luxury' Aesthetic Procedure Taxes, Restrictions

BY BETSY BATES  
Los Angeles Bureau

SANTA MONICA, CALIF. — When state coffers get low, legislators go hunting for cash.

Lately, in states such as Maryland and New York, lawmakers have been considering taxes on "luxury" items from upscale cars to aesthetic surgery offices, Dr. Ron Wheeland said at a cosmetic dermatology seminar sponsored by Skin Disease Education Foundation.

"This is not a new idea," he said, citing longstanding sales taxes on cosmetic surgery procedures in New Jersey and Minnesota.

In New Jersey, in fact, a Senate bill seeks to repeal the 2004 sales tax on cosmetic procedures because it generated far less money than expected.

But that experience hasn't stopped other states from trying.

In Tennessee, it's the same tune with different lyrics, as legislators consider a tax on devices and equipment used in cosmetic procedures, rather than targeting the consumers who pay for laser procedures and facelifts, he said.

Aesthetic procedures are also in the legislative spotlight with regard to safety and oversight, Dr. Wheeland said during a talk on the "new truths" in dermatology.

Restricting procedures and imposing tighter oversight measures are seen as "white hat" moves for legislators, who like to be seen protecting constituents, even in cases when not all the facts are in, said Dr. Wheeland, director of dermatologic

surgery at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

In Virginia, House Bill 1399 would establish as a professional entity "laser light technicians" who would report not to the state boards that oversee physicians or nurses but to the board that oversees barbers and cosmetologists.

"I can only hope that that bill is defeated," he said.

In Georgia, Illinois, and California, proposed legislation would require preoperative examinations prior to laser or cosmetic surgical procedures. In Arizona, a bill is being considered that would allow non-physicians to perform aesthetic procedures with lasers or light devices without physician supervision if they pass a 40-hour course.

Another bill in Illinois, which was referred to the rules committee in April, would permit only board-certified plastic surgeons to inject Botox, perform chemical peels, or perform aesthetic laser procedures.

"This one bothers me the most," said Dr. Wheeland. "When you think of these three procedures in particular, the first thing that ought to pop into your mind is that all three were developed by dermatologists."

It behooves dermatologists to be alert to themes and patterns in legislative proposals and to become involved when their own states are considering laws that would have a direct impact on the practice of dermatology, Dr. Wheeland said.

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## Medical Spa Inhouse Marketing Lures 6,000 New Patients a Year

BY BETSY BATES  
Los Angeles Bureau

SANTA MONICA, CALIF. — Don't bother leafing through the pages of glossy, upscale San Diego magazines to find advertisements for Dr. Mitchel P. Goldman's successful, 6-year-old medical spa.

Magazine marketing recruits mostly "looky-loos," said Dr. Goldman at a cosmetic dermatology seminar sponsored by Skin Disease Education Foundation.

Most of the marketing for La Jolla (Calif.) Spa MD occurs only after a patient enters the column-framed, wood-and-glass doors and is greeted by one of 92 staff members for a dermatology, cosmetic surgery, or cosmetic dentistry procedure; wellness/longevity consultation; spa service, or a trip to the retail center.

Then, "it's all marketing," from the videos playing in the waiting room and the artfully displayed brochures to the up-close (and sometimes alarming) computer analysis of patients' faces and flaws, with a scorecard and list of recommended procedures.

The patient who arrives for a



Dr. Mitchel P. Goldman's upscale marketing efforts are paying off.

simple \$150 massage—the least profitable service in the spa—might also be informed that a cancellation has left a Botox appointment available, for 10% off.

Spa aestheticians, massage therapists, and make-up specialists receive incentives when their clients sign up for cosmetic medical procedures.

Established patients, whose names go into the computer database, receive discount coupons, specials, and gift cards. Birthday and anniversary cards arrive each year, with \$50-off

coupons. The spa newsletter features special promotions.

Upward of 10,000 Web site visitors a month, often drawn to the site by word-of-mouth, learn about spa and medical services, schedule spa "packages"—(the 3-hour, four-treatment "anti-cellulite sampler" goes for \$620), and purchase products once they establish an online account, thus entering the database to receive e-mail blast offers for discount services.

Although he is not big on print and broadcast advertising, Dr. Goldman said he is generous with his time for interviews with journalists. He also promotes the spa by making generous charitable donations. At any given time, the practice may be conducting 20 active clinical trials, any of which may draw a newcomer who will then return as a paying customer.

Dr. Goldman's unconventional, upscale marketing efforts seem to be paying off. In the past 3 years, the number of new patients rose from 5,600 to 5,700, to 6,000, respectively, he said.

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### What's Hot and What's Not at An Upscale California MediSpa

Dr. Goldman, founder of the La Jolla Spa MD medical spa, recently shared his observations about which treatments are "in," which are "out," and which aren't worth the trouble.

Ubiquitous Botox procedures, always a draw, and requests for other facial fillers have been up 25% in recent months at his spa, as a down economy induces penny-pinching socialites to seek out temporary, relatively affordable alternatives to big-ticket cosmetic surgery procedures, according to Dr. Goldman.

As a whole, aesthetic surgery procedures declined 10% last year, while appointments for plastic surgery took a 50% dive, said Dr. Goldman. Adding that breast implants, facelifts, and blepharoplasty procedures have seen a decline "all over California."

He predicted the popularity of these procedures will rebound with "pent-up demand" once the economy improves.

Leg vein procedures, hair removal, photodynamic therapy for acne, and intense pulsed light treatments are all holding their own, and cosmetic dentistry has proved to be "very profitable," he said.

The spa's retail center, which features a variety of skin products, has shown 133% growth in 5 years, now generating \$1.5 million/year in sales.

Dr. Goldman doesn't recommend catering to patients requesting laser tattoo removal.

"They're the worst patients in the world," who may have paid \$100 while drunk to get a tattoo and are irritated at the notion of paying thousands for 5-50 treatments to have them removed, he said.