

Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons talk honestly: advice to residents interested in the specialty

We took a poll and asked a small selection of ISAPS plastic surgeons all over the world what, if anything, they would tell young residents who were interested in getting into the specialty of aesthetic plastic surgery. Hear for yourself what their advice is:

“Everyone I knew thought being a plastic surgeon was glamorous. But my ten years of training - going to medical school, doing a general surgery residency, years of research and specialized fellowships, working 100-hour weeks and countless overnight on-call shifts - was anything but glamorous!”

“Even if you practice in London, Paris, New York or Hollywood, you will almost never have celebrity patients; it’s actually quite rare.”

“Everyone claims to understand how hard it is to balance a career with a family and children. But it’s multiplied by a hundred for plastic surgeons: you may not have time for kids. If you do have them, it’s a constant struggle to do everything, and the ones who usually end up shortchanged on time with you are your children. When you get far enough in your career to have a private practice, you can be more flexible with scheduling, but you may still need to have assistance with childcare from designated family members or a nanny.”

“I focused for years on my education and training, which of course was necessary. But I also wish I’d been given a little bit of direction about running a practice as well. The business part – paperwork and finances, dealing with insurance and customer satisfaction – is a full-time job itself, even if you’re lucky enough to have a good office manager.”

“There’s really no such thing as an ‘average’ plastic surgery patient; our patients come from all ages and backgrounds, but for the most part they’re just regular people who want to change one or two things about their appearance...and change their lives in the process.”

“You spend a LOT of time with patients outside of surgery. Even if a patient has some background knowledge about the procedure(s) they’re looking for, you still need to talk with them at length to make sure their understanding is accurate and their expectations are realistic. You need to get to know their health histories and a bit about their lifestyles, and walk them through the planning stages before surgery...plus all the followup appointments!”

“People seem to have a difficult time believing that women can be excellent surgeons. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve been mistaken for a nurse or a physical therapist!”

“Although it’s rare, some patients do seek plastic surgery for the wrong reasons. Maybe they’re trying to avoid a divorce, or someone else is pressuring them to do it, or they want to look like a certain celebrity. You have to learn to spot red flags. People won’t always be happy with your work, and it can be difficult not to take it personally. Some of them are happier after I do free revision surgery after a six-to-twelve-month waiting period. Some of them, though, will simply

never be happy – all you can do is try to show them the differences before and after, and refer them to another surgeon if that’s what they want.”

“Because popular media tends to sensationalise plastic surgery, a lot of people don’t have an accurate idea of what we do. Ethical, board-certified plastic surgeons don’t make people look like Michael Jackson. We change much more than people’s appearance; we help them change their perspective. Their lives are improved by the increase in confidence plastic surgery gives them. It’s like they finally feel whole.”

If you had known all these things in advance, would you still have chosen to study and practice aesthetic plastic surgery? Of course you would. The greatest reward any plastic surgeon can have is helping others transform their lives – both inside and out.