



Getting to Yes

Understanding the decision-making process of prospective patients can help you anticipate the information they need as they investigate treatments.

For patients, the decision-making process on whether to undergo a medical cosmetic procedure is extensive and complex. On average, the process from interest to booking a surgical procedure takes 27 weeks. For minimally invasive or noninvasive procedures, this process is significantly shorter but involves a similar period of research and consideration. Understanding this process can help your practice better reach prospective patients at each step and provide the information they need to make an educated decision about their aesthetic care.

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The decision-making process begins, of course, with a specific aesthetic concern and involves investigating

treatment options, researching medical providers, determining costs, learning about the risks and treatment processes and making a final decision on whether to book the treatment or surgical procedure.

“This is really bothering me.” In the first steps of the decision-making process, the prospective patient begins to think about addressing a cosmetic concern that is bothering them. They conduct online research to determine if there are treatment options available. If they currently have an aesthetic medical provider, they may ask about what services the provider offers to address their specific concerns. They may do additional offline research to identify possible treatment options. This often involves talking to friends and family members. During this



step in the process, they often do cursory online research investigating medical providers who offer the treatment or treatments they are seeking.

“Can I afford it?” The difference between booking an appointment with a hair stylist or trying a new skincare line and booking a medical procedure is cost and the potential risk of complications. Before a consumer begins to investigate providers and consider risks and downtime, they need to know whether treatment is even a possibility based on their finances.

The prospective patient typically looks online for information on the cost of potential treatments they have been investigating and also begins a more in-depth online search for potential providers. This includes looking for providers who specialize in treating their concern and looking at review sites of those providers. The prospective patient typically calls practices in their area for more information on the cost of the procedures.

“Is it safe?” Once they have determined that the cost of the procedure is not a barrier, the next concern is safety, which moves their focus to the providers. This step may involve speaking to friends and family members to get their feedback on undergoing a procedure as well as to gather referrals if they have acquaintances who have undergone medical aesthetic treatments or surgeries. The prospective patient will also continue researching various providers’ websites and online reviews and will then schedule consultations with one or two potential providers to learn more about the treatment options and gauge their comfort level with the providers at the top of their lists.

Based on their interactions with the practice on the phone and during the consultation, they may continue to investigate other providers and treatment options or they may move to the next step of determining whether to book the procedure.

“Is this right for me?” Armed with more information on the cost, risks and downtime of the recommended treatment options, the prospective patient considers their personal finances to determine if the procedure is affordable. They also consider the downtime—and whether they can fit that into their work and personal schedules—and the potential adverse events. At this point on the decision-making path, the consumer makes a tentative decision whether to book the procedure.

“I’m ready.” The final step in the process is the decision to book treatment. At this point, the individual has determined in their own mind that they will have the procedure.

PROVIDERS ROLE IN THE PROCESS

There are numerous ways that practices can assist consumers as they consider, investigate and then book treatments. Each step on this path provides an opportunity to promote your services and providers to consumers interested in medical cosmetic treatments.

Highlight solutions. Use your website and YouTube channel to educate patients about the treatments and procedures your practice offers. You can organize this by indication—highlighting the range of treatment options for specific concerns. Your goal is to provide

Cost is one of the primary obstacles for prospective patients.

information on the services you provide, indications you are able to treat, how the different treatment modalities work and what patients can expect pre-, during and post-treatment. Share honest before-and-after photos with an explanation of the number of treatment sessions and/or modalities used for combination treatment regimens.

Include bios of your providers on your website, including their training, specialties and sub-specialties and number of years in practice or number of treatments performed, as well as awards or accolades earned.

Feature common aesthetic concerns and the range of solutions available on your social media pages with links to more information on your website. Social media is also a great place to introduce staff members and celebrate their accomplishments.

Prospective patients also do research offline, so have printed educational materials on your treatment options readily available at your facility. The educational materials should be easy to understand and include a contact name and number for more information.

Instill trust. Train your front desk to credential your providers to all callers. All members of your practice team should also receive ongoing training on the services you provide, so they are ready to answer inquiries from prospective patients.

We live in an electronic age, and consumers will evaluate your practice based on your online presence including your ratings on multiple review sites. Keep a close eye on review sites so you can address any negative feedback and work with those patients to resolve their concerns. Ask satisfied patients to post online reviews and/or make video testimonials that can be included on your website—I recommend video testimonials rather than written statements.

During the consultation, be sure you understand the patient's concerns and be upfront about recovery time and potential adverse events.

Address the cost question. The question of whether practices should post prices on their websites or service menus is a tricky one. This can be particularly fraught for surgical practices where there may be a wide range, depending on the patient's needs and the complexity of the surgery. If you do not wish to publicly post pricing,

be aware of the information that is out there on the Internet. And be prepared to explain your costs during the consultation, particularly if they are significantly higher than what you are seeing promoted online.

Train front desk staff how to answer questions about procedure costs and, if you don't already, consider offering virtual consultations where you can learn more about the patient's aesthetic concerns and discuss cost in a more convenient manner for both the practice and patient.

During the consultation (online or in-person), take the time necessary to answer questions in terms the patient understands. Offer options, whenever possible, so they can find a solution that fits their financial situation.

Cost is one of the primary obstacles for prospective patients. Planning ahead and saving for a procedure can be a big challenge; this is further complicated by their not knowing the total cost and upfront payment required. So be very honest with patients about the total cost, including anesthesiologist and post-care products and appointments for surgeries, or the need for multiple sessions for nonsurgical treatments.

Offering payment plans or financing options, such as Ally Lending or CareCredit, are good options for patients worried about making a large upfront payment. Be prepared to discuss how these programs work, if you offer them.

Follow informed consent. Once the patient has decided to move forward and book a procedure, do your due diligence in informing the patient of any potential complications, provide pre- and post-care instructions and also review what will happen during the procedure.

Understanding the decision-making process of consumers seeking aesthetic procedures can help you proactively address their concerns and provide answers in a way that will lead them to your practice or medspa door once they are ready to commit. **ME**



Cheryl Whitman is founder and CEO of Beautiful Forever, an aesthetic business-consulting firm, and the Beautiful Forever University training program for medspas, and author of *Beautifully Profitable, Forever Profitable*. Contact her at cheryl@beautifulforever.com, 561.299.3909.