

Verda
 "Subzero"
 on PBS
 tonight.
 Page 8.


Magazine

SECTION E

TUESDAY, JUNE 11, 2002

www.philly.com

Cautions on those casual Botox shots

Experts and unhappy patients tell of eye droops, bruises and other potential ugly results from the lid "party" poison.



The surgeon questions a "consent" that before Botox party wins.

By Mark McCullough
 Contributing writer

The Botox backlash has begun. Less than two months after the government approved the prescription drug as a temporary wrinkle-reducer for the brow — turning a cheek cosmetic of the rich into a household item — serious questions are being raised about its casual use.

Doctors, medical societies and patients are stepping forward to warn on hidden use of the toxin, especially at Botox parties.

"How voluntary and intelligent is an 'informed consent' that follows a gloss or two of wine?" invited New York City cosmetic plastic surgeon Paula Muzina.

The American Society of Dermatology and the American Society for Aes-

thetic Plastic Surgery have announced their disapproval of injecting Botox in "casual social settings" — something that, in Pennsylvania, Florida and several other states, is supposed to be done by a doctor or by a nurse under a doctor's supervision.

Some of the risk-taking smacks of litigation — dermatologists and plastic surgeons are now facing competition in the lucrative Botox beauty business. But there is no doubt that even in the best hands, the paralyzing poison can have unexpected results.

Consider Ruth Wittington, 46, of Southampton. About 18 months ago, a dermatologist she consulted about a hair treatment suggested Botox for her forehead furrow. A week later, she said, both of her eyelids were so droopy that she had to fill the slit with her fingers to apply eyeshadow.

"For a couple months, I looked like I was sleepy all the time," said Wittington. See **BOTOX** on E3.



Joan Chai receives injections of Botox from a surgeon during a Florida seminar. Use of the drug for cosmetic wrinkle-smoothing was approved in April.

Tuesday, June 11, 2002

THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

Experts caution on use of Botox

BOTOX from E1

ton, a mother of three who manages her husband's plumbing business office. "I had people say to me, 'What's wrong? It looks like you've been up all night crying.'"

The dermatologist, who refused a refund, suggested another try in three or four months, after the Botox wore off. But Wittington's eyes had been opened, at least metaphorically: "Would I do it again? I'd have to be out of my mind!"

Botox (and competing brand Myobloc), a highly purified toxin from the clostridium botulinum bacteria, has been a godsend for people with neuro-muscular disorders that cramp and disable some part of the body — the hand, leg, foot, neck, eyes, even voice box.

But vanity, not disability, is what makes Botox such a pretty poison.

A \$450, 100-unit vial of powder, mixed with saline, might treat two typical movement-disorder patients, but it can dose three to five cosmetic patients. At \$300 to \$1,000 per face, the or four times a year — cash, please, in-

urance won't cover cosmetic use — cosmetic treatment is a nice sideline for any physician. (Drug-maker Allergan expects its \$330 million Botox sales to climb by as much as a third this year.)

A party makes things even nicer by reducing the chance of wasting the reconstituted drug, which should be used within four hours, said Allan Wolk, an Abington Ocular plastic surgeon who does Botox information sessions — but not parties.

"I think if people are at a party, there is a subtle peer pressure to have the procedure that wouldn't exist if people took the time to go to a doctor's office," Wolk said.

Many doctors who do parties forbid alcohol. Besides impairing judgment, alcohol dilates the blood vessels, increasing the chance of injection-site bruising.

But even when alcohol is banned, Botox does not belong in hotel rooms, hair salons or other nonmedical settings, critics say. Among potential problems: The patient's medical history may be glossed over; biomedical waste may be disposed of improperly; the drug's effec-

Quick fixes

Newsweek

- Office procedures with easy
- OR procedure less than recovery

Allan Wolk, an Abington plastic surgeon, lectures at Philmont Country Club. He gives Botox information sessions, but not parties.

tiveness may be reduced due to lack of refrigeration; the injection may go astray because the patient's head is not in a headrest; and patients may faint.

"You can get people who will faint with any injections," said Kirk Brandow, a Bala Cynwyd plastic surgeon. "In the office, we have smelling salts and oxygen and an EKG machine to check the heart. I think any doctor's office would have that, but not a party."

In forehead areas, a bad Botox shot can cause droopy eyes or even double vision. Cheek use can also lead to what Wolk calls the "Joan Rivers look": a devilish Y-shape droop in the brow.

But the lips and neck are

where incorrect or unskilled cosmetic Botox injections can really be dangerous. (Doctors have discretion to use Botox in areas that are not specifically approved.) Case reports of patients unable to speak or swallow have appeared in medical journals.

At least one nonmedical person, a Tallahassee, Fla., beauty salon owner, has faced criminal charges — practicing medicine without a license and illegal possession of prescription drugs — for giving Botox injections.

"I think the next story will be a Botox party gone wrong," Brandow said.

Contact Marie McCullough at 215-684-2720 or mmccullough@phillynews.com.