

INDIA TODAY Aspire

Cover Story

PLASTIC SURGERY

Plastic surgery and India go back a long way. Sushruta Samhita, a fifth century BC surgeon in India is regarded as the "father of plastic surgery". In an age when most of the world was still living in caves he first developed the practice of rhinoplasty. At that time, it was a reconstructive surgery for those whose noses had been severed as a punishment. But what began as recourse for victims of draconian laws later became the keystone to several successful Hollywood careers.

Now, when looking ugly is perhaps a greater sin than murder, getting a plastic surgery is becoming almost as mundane as grocery shopping. As Sunil Choudhary, Head of the Department, Max Institute of Aesthetic & Reconstructive Plastic Surgery corroborates, "There has been an annual increase of nearly twenty to twenty five per cent in the demand for aesthetic procedures."

Image conscious urbanites are lining up for a tummy tuck or a nose tweak like never before. And no, these are not just your pampered rich brats or page-3 trophy wives who are going under the knife. Almost sixty seven per cent of the patients are from the middle class and a huge chunk of these are men. Given these figures, it does not take a rocket scientist to guess that this is the right time to make a career in plastic surgery.

Plastic surgery has two subdivisions, aesthetic and reconstructive. Aesthetic surgery is all about making

INSTITUTES

- PGIMER, Chandigarh
www.pgimer.nic.in
- Satnley Medical College, Chennai
www.stanmed.net

STARTING SALARY

Rs 5 lakh per year

QUALIFICATION

MBBS, MS followed by a M.Ch or DNB

BODY Sculpto

PATH-BREAKING RESEARCH AND SWIFT ACCEPTANCE BY THE PUBLIC HAVE MADE PLASTIC SURGERY ONE OF THE MOST DYNAMIC AND LUCRATIVE SURGICAL FIELDS

people look younger or in proportion. On the other hand, reconstructive surgery deals with birth defects, cancer, trauma and burns cases.

Path-breaking research and swift acceptance by the public have made both aesthetic and reconstructive two of the most dynamic and lucrative surgical fields. The desire to emulate ramp models has made liposuction the number one aesthetic surgery procedure. Nose reshaping and new exciting minimally invasive techniques of 'feather lift' for face rejuvenation are also gaining popularity these days. The perennial favourites, of-course, are OPD (out patients' department) procedures like botox injections and wrinkle fillers. With the improvement in trauma and cancer management, the need for complex reconstructive procedures to improve the quality of life for these patients is also on a rise.

Like other specialities of medicine, plastic surgery too requires long years of patience and hard work before one can start reaping fruit of one's labour.

Gold mine: The field of plastic surgery offers exponential growth



INDIA TODAY Aspire



It takes more than 13 years in order to become a full fledged plastic surgeon as one requires a basic Master's in Surgery (MS) followed by M.Ch (Master's in Chirurgiae) or DNB (Diploma National Board). Several surgeons then choose to sub specialise in fields such as aesthetic or microsurgery

Although, there is a high demand for good plastic surgeons in India, but few colleges in India are able to provide adequate training in this speciali-

sation. There are less than 100 plastic surgeons who qualify every year from government medical colleges. "The demand for aesthetic surgeons is increasing but few colleges give training in this speciality. Plastic surgeons are largely trained in reconstructive procedures," says Dr Ajaya Kashyap, senior consultant and chief of plastic surgery, Fortis.

Most of the training in M.Ch courses takes place in private medical colleges which are ill equipped to provide adequate training inputs for the aesthetic branch and majority of doctors look to overseas centres for appropriate fellowships in this discipline. One has to clear overseas exams to work there and get registered. Countries like UK, USA and Australia and New Zealand do have such fellowships but it has to be kept in mind that these are highly sought-after courses and the competition is rather stiff. But according to established plastic surgeons, going abroad for training is a worthwhile investment. "Some of us who trained abroad have benefited immensely and most of these programmes are taken to be at par with the M.Ch program and given due recognition by our National Plastic Surgery Association," explains Dr Chaudhary.

After completing the training, one can either go in for individual or group private practice or join a hospital. This means that one can either become an assistant professor in a government institution or a junior consultant in non-teaching hospitals. Starting pay packages in government hospitals is around Rs 40,000 per month, whereas in private practice there is no upper or lower limits as most of the hospitals don't give out a fixed pay but work on the basis of a revenue sharing policy. "Growth in a government institution is often time bound. In private hospital there is no set pattern, but if you are good, growth is exponential," says Dr Shiv Saha, senior consultant, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, New Delhi. Even though the field promises great pecuniary rewards, it has to be kept in mind that this is a highly complex area.

EXPERT SPEAK



DR SUNIL CHOUDHARY, HoD,
MAX INSTITUTE OF PLASTIC SURGERY

First, it is not cosmetic surgery. This is a term floated around by the media, but we doctors prefer to call it plastic surgery. Second, its future in India is very bright. Thanks to media awareness, it is gradually becoming acceptable to the Indian public. It is also becoming increasingly affordable. In fact, it is the middle class that forms our biggest base of patients these days. Nearly 67 per cent of our patient base is from there. The speciality is still in its infancy as far as growth is concerned and hence there is a huge potential. One expects a boom in the next few years. Also, it is expected that the number of international patients will soar.

BHASKAR PAUL / www.indiatodayimg.com