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Patients No. 1 at practice

By Georgann Yara

Special for The Republic | azcentral.com

For those who think the impact of cosmetic procedures is skin-deep, Dr. Martin Blume has a number of patients who would beg to differ.

One of them is a woman who walked into his Scottsdale practice, the Blume Skin Centre, about six months ago. She had been diagnosed for the second time with cancer, was losing weight and had been feeling down. After receiving non-surgical cosmetic treatments on her face, her mood changed, Blume said.

"She said, 'This made me feel better. My husband has always been supportive, but this has made our relationship better,' " Blume recalled. "That's what I enjoy, seeing the change in people."

Blume has several cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy who have gotten the OK from their oncologists to

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Blume

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receive a facial, microdermabrasion, fillers or other non-invasive services.

"They say, 'I need a boost. I need a pick-me-up ... something because I feel down about myself.' And they tell me it does make them feel better," Blume said. "When you look better, you feel better."

Spending more time with patients and getting to know each one individually were among Blume's goals when he regained ownership of his practice in April 2011. Going the extra mile to provide good customer service is another. Blume and his staff have worked evenings and Saturdays to accommodate patients' schedules.

Blume has bought, run and sold practices since 1980. In 2009, he and his former business partners sold the practice he owns today to a medical company.

Blume continued to work at the practice, but administrative duties made up 75 percent of his work while his remaining time was spent doing procedures and teaching.

But two years later, Blume had a change of heart. He said the new owners' philosophies on running the practice differed from the ones that had brought him success for many years.

Blume had always emphasized patient relations.

"I spend time with people, not just 15 minutes. When they come in for Botox, I ask if they understand how Botox works, not just, 'Sit down,'" said Blume, a graduate of the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine. "I enjoy talking to people."

The terms of the agreement allowed Blume to buy back the practice. But he found himself in a red-tape battle that eventually forced him to change the company phone numbers, e-mail address and name. He received an eviction notice and had 30 days to find a new location.

"It was a rough start. I had to start over," he said.

However, Blume quickly found a new facility and stabilized the business. The center has about 1,700 active patients and performs 15 to 20 services a day, Blume said. Some of his patients come from outside Arizona.

Blume credited his employees, who have a good amount of life experience, for some of that success and for drawing patients with a history of cancer or other serious illnesses.

"My employees understand what many of my mature patients are going through. It makes them feel comfortable, that they are being understood," Blume said.

For eight years, GingerLee Colson has been a patient of Blume's and was hired as a part-time aesthetician three months ago. She also was diagnosed with sarcoidosis, a rare autoim-



Dr. Martin Blume believes being personable is important to a successful practice. "I enjoy talking to people," he says. CHARLIE LEIGHT/THE REPUBLIC

mune disease with no apparent cause or cure.

Colson has been undergoing treatment to ease her symptoms; the side effects include hair loss and extreme growth, shingles and hormone imbalances, among others. She got fillers when her face started to get concave and sickly looking.

Being a patient has given Colson a better understanding of what clients, particularly those with a serious condition, are experiencing. It's this kind of care that makes the center stand out, she said.

"I can understand what they're going through. We talk about the things we can control to make us look and feel better," said Colson, who lives in Glendale. "Everyone listens to each person to find out what your

needs are. You're never in and out or rushed."

A friend referred Blume to Phoenix attorney Ellen Levy two years ago, and she has been getting Botox, fillers, facials, peels and other services from him since.

When she's in court or speaking to a jury, Levy said, a good appearance helps her project confidence.

She had been to two doctors for injections previously but became a return client for Blume.

"He is kind, compassionate and listens, which is Number 1," Levy said. "He never tries to talk to you into (doing) something more. ... He's said, 'Let's be conservative.'"

The recession hamstrung many small businesses that relied on discretionary spending

THE BLUME SKIN CENTRE

Where: 8575 E. Princess Drive, Suite 123, Scottsdale.

Employees: Seven.

Interesting stat: Of the 9 million cosmetic procedures performed in the United States in 2011, 82 percent were non-surgical procedures, according to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery.

More details: 480-699-7999, blumeskintreatment.com.

or services that are considered luxuries. Blume said he experienced a decrease in business when the recession hit, right before he sold the practice.

But recently, he has seen an upswing in people opting for non-surgical procedures instead of more-costly, invasive methods of improving their appearance.

"People would put off plastic surgery and have fillers, Botox and peels," Blume said. "It created some understanding that, around the face, there are a number of things you can do to improve your look without surgery."

Blume stays up to date on new procedures and developments, which he said many experienced doctors stop doing.

He also approaches business on a more personal than clinical level.

"One of the things I can do best is understand the patient," he said.