

Colby L. Presley, DO†
Anthony M. Rossi, MD§

* Department of Internal Medicine, Mount Sinai Hospital,
New York, New York

† Department of Dermatology, Duke University, Durham,
North Carolina

‡ Division of Dermatology, Lehigh Valley Health Network,
Allentown, Pennsylvania

§ Department of Dermatology, Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center, New York, New York

This research was funded, in part, by NIH/NCI Cancer Center
Support Grant P30 CA008748.

The authors have indicated no significant interest with
commercial supporters.

Trends in Medical Spa Statistics and Patient Safety

In 2023, the medical spa industry in the United States is projected to garner as much as \$20 billion in revenue, doubled from just 4 years prior.¹ This net growth occurred even as 84% of medical spa locations temporarily closed their doors because of the global COVID-19 pandemic.¹ By 2025, the annual revenue is expected to increase by another 25%.¹ Anyone can open a clinic by collaborating with a licensed member of the medical community, which may account for 70% of the medical spas lacking any affiliation with a medical practice.¹

The average annual revenue expected for an individual medical spa is more than \$1.5 million as of 2021, with an annual expected growth of >10%.¹ Consequently, this is an immensely profitable industry that has exploded in popularity in the past decade. Since 2010, the number of

medical spas nationwide have increased nearly six-fold and currently employ more than 70 thousand people.¹ These clinics offer various services including botulinum toxin, injectable fillers, and laser procedures. However, questions abound regarding the safety of these procedures to the consumer in an industry growing faster than it can be regulated.

As of 2022, 66% of medical spas were owned by a private, single individual; however, only 37% were owned by physicians. Of the physician-owned spas, dermatologists accounted for only 4%, despite being one of the few specialties with postgraduate residency training requirements in cosmetics. 23% of single-owner medical spas were owned by nurse practitioners, doubling from 11% in 2019 (Figure 1).¹

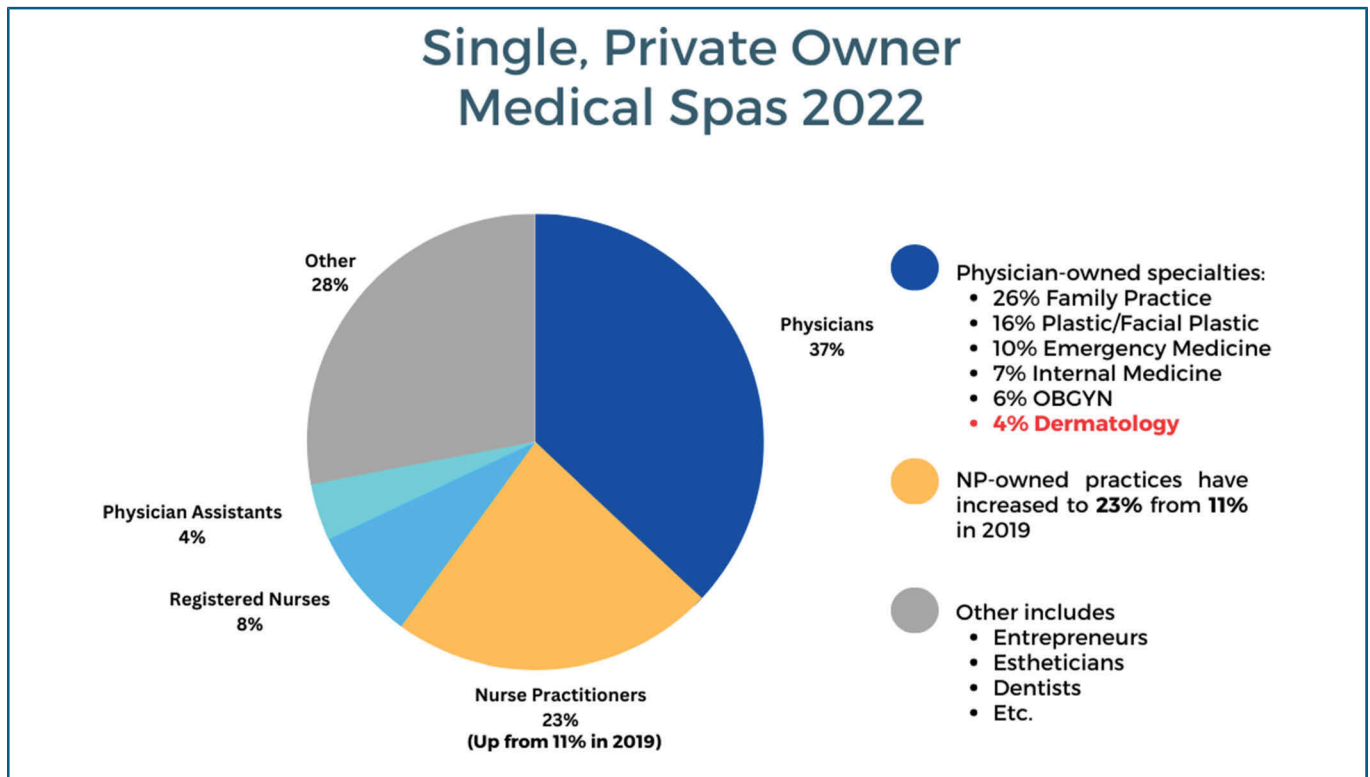


Figure 1. According to the AmSpa State of the Industry Report, 37% of single, private owner medical spas were owned by physicians in 2022. Merely 4% of physician-owned medical spas were owned by dermatologists. Medical spas owned by NPs (nurse practitioners) have more than doubled from 11% to 23% since 2019.

A 2020 survey demonstrated that 70% of surveyed dermatologists in the United States reported seeing at least 1 patient, and as many as 20, with cosmetic complications in the past 2 years. Most of these were attributable to treatments received from medical spas.² The most common complications included burn, discoloration, misplacement of product, bruising, and scar. From 2008 to 2011, the number of litigated cases involving a nonphysician performing laser surgery more than doubled. Similarly, from 2008 to 2012, nonphysicians performing laser hair removal represented approximately 85.7% of lawsuits despite performing only one-third of laser hair removal procedures in 2012.³ These authors concluded that there is inherent risk in acquiring cosmetic services through nonphysicians.³ By contrast, dermatologists accounted for laser complication rates of 0.24%.⁴

Most surveyed dermatologists believe that medical spas jeopardize patient safety and warrant increased regulation by governing bodies.² However, federal and state governments have not tightly regulated the medical spa industry. Given the variable geographic distribution of medical spas in the United States, meaningful legislation may have to occur at the state level.⁵ Ideally, regulations would acknowledge that most cosmetic dermatologic procedures are safe when performed by board-certified dermatologists.⁴ This calls for dermatologists to educate patients and lawmakers on the potential complications of seeking cosmetic procedures by

inadequately trained or inadequately supervised practitioners at medical spas.

References

1. 2022 Medical Spa State of the Industry Report. *American Med Spa Association in Partnership with Gordian Solutions Group*; 2022.
2. Wang JV, Albornoz CA, Goldbach H, Mesinkovska N, et al. Experiences with medical spas and associated complications: a survey of aesthetic practitioners. *Dermatol Surg* 2020;46:1543–8.
3. Jalian HR, Jalian CA, Avram MM. Increased risk of litigation associated with laser surgery by nonphysician operators. *JAMA Dermatol* 2014;150:407–11.
4. Alam M, Kakar R, Nodzinski M, Ibrahim O, et al. Multicenter prospective cohort study of the incidence of adverse events associated with cosmetic dermatologic procedures: lasers, energy devices, and injectable neurotoxins and fillers. *JAMA Dermatol* 2015;151:271–7.
5. Handley R. The medi-spa: a current cosmetic dermatology public safety concern. *Internet J Acad Phys Assist* 2008;7:1–7.

Justin Eichinger, MS*

Jarett Casale, DO†

Phuong Daniels, DO, DPT†

Ashley Rice, DO, FAAD†

*University of Louisville School of Medicine, Louisville, Kentucky

†Campbell University at Sampson Regional Medical Center, Clinton, North Carolina

The authors have indicated no significant interest with commercial supporters.