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LIP AUGMENTATION
WITH LESS BRUISING

Lily Talakoub, MD
From Public Health to Private Practice

Plus:

- ❖ Off-label Drug Use
- ❖ Growth Factors in Skin Care

The Personal Touch

Dermatologist Lily Talakoub, MD, left public health for private practice so she could help patients one-on-one.

By Shelley Moench-Kelly, MBA

Photography by Mike Morgan

The desire to treat patients of all ages in a one-on-one setting drew Lily Talakoub, MD, away from a career in public health and to dermatology. “I realized that my true joy in life is being with people and talking to people,” says Dr. Talakoub, who worked for the Office of the U.S. Surgeon General during medical school. “Often you follow a career path and realize that career path is not what you expected it to be. I needed to be around people. Public health was not the right place for me.”





Dr. Talakoub's desire to control her own patient care protocols led her to launch a private practice only three months out of residency.

A dermatology specialty means she can treat patients of all ages. "I treat men, women, kids, teens and babies," she says. "In dermatology, you are like the family doctor, but you also do procedures. The breadth of care is what stood out to me."

After graduating with a medical degree and master's in public health from the Boston University School of Medicine, where she was elected to the Alpha Omega Honor Society and awarded the American Medical Association leadership award, Dr. Talakoub completed an internal medicine residency at Stanford University. From there she entered a dermatology residency at the University of California, San Francisco.

"I could take better care of people on my own."

After finishing her dermatology residency in August 2009, Dr. Talakoub went to work with an established dermatology practice. It didn't take long to discover that working for others was not her cup of tea. "I worked there for about two months and realized this was not going to be my life," she says. "You have very little control over the care you provide when you work for somebody else. I knew I could take better care of people on my own." By October, she was searching for office space.

She printed out business cards and walked to all the doctors' offices in her neighborhood to ask if she could sublease space. Out of the 50-plus physicians' offices she contacted,

"Everything I did, I learned through the school of hard knocks."

Today she is the owner of McLean Dermatology and Skincare Center in McLean, Virginia, a clinical educator for dermatology residents and physician assistants at George Washington University Hospital and Wake Forest University, associate professor at Virginia Commonwealth University and a member of the DC Board of Visitors for the Children's National Medical Center.

only one responded. An OB-GYN offered use of an exam room one day a week.

"The practice had only two rooms, and the beds were probably from the 1970s with stirrups attached to them," says Dr. Talakoub. "The whole office was pink. I thought 'OK, this is going to be a little bit awkward for my male patients,' but you make it work."



In nine years, McLean Dermatology has expanded from one treatment room to a 5,000-square-foot facility with a staff of 16.

She answered the phone and made appointments herself in addition to cleaning up after patient procedures. When she wasn't treating patients, Dr. Talakoub networked and learned about business management. "You don't take business classes in medical school. Nobody teaches you anything about practice management, so it was very daunting," she says. "Everything I did, I learned through the school of hard knocks."

Nine years later, McLean Dermatology and Skincare Center is in the midst of its second expansion—to 5,000 square feet—and boasts a staff of 16, including a second dermatologist, a nurse practitioner, four medical assistants and an esthetician. When the current expansion is complete, the facility will feature 15 treatment rooms and adjacent medspa. "This will allow us to do a lot more aesthetic procedures to complement our medical cosmetic

"We live and breathe what we do every day, and the drive to succeed and become better is what I want to see."

For the first two years she didn't draw a salary and focused on building a solid reputation while growing her patient base and practice staff. She reached out to the press and has contributed articles to women's health publications including *SELF*, *Shape* and *Brides*, and appeared on local television networks.

treatments," says Dr. Talakoub. "We have one esthetician and will be hiring new providers to expand our nonmedical offerings."

To attract working patients, McLean Dermatology offers extended hours during the week and Saturday hours, too. Lunch breaks are staggered so patient coverage



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from the ground up.”*

is uninterrupted. The practice also offers a discreet VIP entrance for celebrity and politician clients, and patients are welcome to bring their children with them to appointments, if needed.

“There is nothing beneath me.”

Dr. Talakoub views her role as a practice owner as part trainer/part mentor. She offers a summer internship program for high school students and encourages employees to grow in their careers. “I know they’re not going to be with me forever. I don’t expect it,” she says. “I want them to move on in their careers. I try to foster energy and motivation to be the best at what they do. I tell all candidates, ‘If you think of this as a job, this is not the right place for you. You have to come here and think this is your life. We live and breathe what we do every day, and the drive to succeed and become better is what I want to see.’”

That philosophy has served her well. “Word spreads like wildfire when you really, honestly, just take care of people,” she says. “And I always remember where I started. I know how every system works because I set it up myself. I still call my patients back myself. I still sometimes change over the beds and clean off the supplies and sterilize everything. There is nothing beneath me. It’s a different way of doing things, but I know if everybody called in sick, I could still run the practice myself from the ground up.”

She remembers a piece of advice one of her mentors shared with her: “If you rise up to the top, send the elevator back down. People have helped me by sending that elevator back down. It’s my duty to do that for others,” she says. **ME**

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