



# Sell skin care products to protect your patients

BY LESLIE S. BAUMANN, MD

**T**he ethics behind selling skin care products to patients have been hotly debated within the field of cosmetic dermatology for several decades. In 15 years of practice, I have come to the conclusion that patients want you to and need you to because otherwise they are easily taken advantage of. Other physicians are doing it, but we – the dermatologists – are the most qualified to offer skin care advice. This article will discuss the reasons that you need to get over the ethical dilemma and offer skin care to your patients.

### Using the correct skin care regimen for the face and body will improve outcomes

Whether a patient suffers from acne, rosacea, melasma, psoriasis, eczema, contact dermatitis, or even tinea versicolor, using the proper skin care regimen will improve outcomes by affecting the skin barrier, pH, hydration level, and function of the keratinocytes and fibroblasts. In fact, every personal care product that touches the skin has an impact on skin health. For example, if a patient uses a detergent-laden bar soap, the skin barrier will be impaired, which can cause reactions to allergens and irritants. Personal care products can affect the skin pH; this is shown to play a role in *Malassezia* colonization in atopic dermatitis patients (J Clin Med. 2015;4[6]:1217-28). As dermatologists, we know better than anyone that daily use of SPF improves skin health and lowers the risk of postinflammatory pigmentation. We all agree that patients should cleanse the skin and apply a SPF every day. Giving them guidance about which to choose is very important.

### Giving the patient exact instructions will lead to improved compliance

Why should recommending skin care products be perceived differently than prescribing a prescription medication? We should prescribe to our patients in writing the exact skin care regimen they should use for their face or body to ensure that they understand the directions. I have been surprised by patients who have said, “I did not know I was supposed to wash my cleanser off,” or “I wash my face with hand soap.” We can help them by educating them and giving them specific instructions. Improved education and communication results in increased compliance. When you do surgery on a wound, you probably tell patients to apply a topical antibiotic ointment, but do you direct them to what cleanser to use or tell them which SPF to use on the stitched wound? Providing written instructions for all dermatologic disorders and post-procedure care is necessary to improve compliance and outcomes.

### Combine cosmeceuticals, prescription medications, and medical procedures

You (unlike the cosmetic counter salesperson) have the ability to combine cosmeceuticals with prescription medications and medical procedures. In fact, selling your patients the right skin care products to use after a procedure saves them a trip to the store and ensures that they use the correct products. Of course it makes sense that patients getting toxins and fillers should use a retinoid to improve skin aging; however, many general dermatologic diseases would improve with the proper skin care. For example, do you use biologics for psoriasis? Using the proper skin care to regulate skin pH and improve the skin barrier may help prevent colonization of yeast, fungus, and bacteria. The same is true for atopic patients. Do you use liquid nitrogen? Studies show that using a retinoid before a procedure speeds healing. Skin care goes way beyond wrinkles and dark circles under the eyes, so if you are not prescribing the patient an exact regimen, you are not maximizing outcomes.

### I don't have time to talk to my patients about skin care

The missing piece is that most of us don't have the time to spend discussing skin care. This is where using a standardized scientific methodology is crucial. I developed and use a skin typing methodology in my office and have seen improved physician/patient relationships and in-

- Most skin care products that patients buy are not appropriate for their skin issues.
- Dermatologists have the most knowledge and insights to prescribe skin care.
- Giving specific skin care instructions helps improve communication.
- Increased communication improves outcomes.



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creased patient satisfaction resulting in a significant amount of referrals. We also have noted decreased call backs and fewer adverse events from products because the patients have a better understanding of how to properly apply the cosmeceuticals and prescription products. The best part? It does not add any time onto the patient visit when standardized methodologies are properly adopted.

### What if I still do not feel comfortable profiting from the sale of skin care products?

You need to realize that time is money and you are saving the patient the cost in time it would have taken them to go to a store, park, and shop for the correct product. I have seen data presented from several companies that show patients usually spend a large amount of money on skin care products after they see their dermatologist. Without guidance, they will likely buy the incorrect products. If they buy the wrong product, you save them the hassle of having to make another office visit and the aggravation of the side effects from the incorrect product. These are often of poor quality or not appropriate for their skin issues. Counterfeit products are rampant on the Internet, and many new companies tout worthless products with stem cells and other nonsense. Only you can help your patients make sure that money is spent on the proper products.

### Conclusion

Do you really want someone else giving your patients skin care advice? Your patients deserve to have someone with your insights, knowledge, compassion, and honesty help them achieve optimal skin health through use of the proper cosmeceuticals and prescription medications. It is up to you and your staff to save your patients from falling prey to persuasive salespeople with no scientific knowledge or concern for long-term skin health. ■



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