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Plastic Surgery: Miami telling of medical care in Montana

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For The Gazette**

A couple of times a year, I attend various national medical conferences to keep abreast of the latest developments in treatment, technology and industry-driven propaganda. One of the great challenges is sorting out the preening academic liars, shameless self-promoters and the occasional good doctor with a good idea. Like any job or profession, it is always intriguing to see what other people are doing in other markets.

This meeting was in Miami, which used to be in the United States. When I asked the concierge in the downtown hotel where I could walk to see the sights, he said "depends on what you are packing."

This was a facial cosmetic meeting put on by some big-time New York, L.A. and Miami surgeons. These are some of the guys who do the celebrities, the rich and the wannabe of the above. During several of the sessions there were live surgical cases being broadcast into the auditorium, and we could ask questions of the surgeons doing the cases. The video quality was amazing, and it is a great way to evaluate procedures. It was also amazing to see how really ordinary most of these guys are surgically, and that they gain their exalted status through extraordinary marketing and publicity. I didn't see anything we don't do as well or better in Billings (and vastly cheaper).

Some interesting trends have developed. The "thread lifts," those so-called non-invasive face lifts done with threads under the cheeks,

appear to be quite dead. The "short-scar" facelift is becoming more popular as people seek less downtime. The weakening economy has increased the use of fillers for lines under the eyes, nasal folds and lips. Botox continues to be strong. Facial lasering is starting to become more defined, as the wimpier lasers aren't working or holding up. The more aggressive lasers, such as the carbon dioxide fractionated laser, have more redness and downtime but have good results. There are a million lasers on the market, many promising minimal downtime, but people don't like paying for minimal results, either. Basically, it turns out that you can't get something for nothing, which is a big surprise.

One new technology that looks like it might be legitimate is ultrasonic fat removal. This is focused fat destruction, done with high frequency ultrasound, which is done without incisions across the skin. It basically uses high frequency energy to explode fat, which the body then absorbs. Called UltraPulse, it has shown promise in European trials, and I will keep you posted. Of course the machine will cost 150,000 smackers, like every other one out there.

There sure weren't many Nip and Tuck surgeons there that I could see. The vast majority were middle-aged or older, dumpy, paunchy and bald.

I am admittedly middle aged, bald, and dumpy, but not paunchy, which made me feel quite superior. Between the wives and industry reps, there were enough over-sized breast implants that, if dropped on Afghanistan, would crush the Taliban.

I also pondered the wisdom of a New York socialite surgeon wearing a \$5,000 Armani outfit and a hairpiece that looked like it took fourth place in the Westminster dog show.

I came away with ideas about refinements in eyelid surgery, a few new perspectives on shaping noses and considerable relief that we had invested in the right laser. Most of all, I felt once again that Billings is offering some of the best care in the country.

From cosmetic surgery to cancer care to heart disease, we are doing state-of-the-art care in an environment that doesn't have many of the

problems of bigger markets. I think the quality of life offered in Montana attracts a level of talent and quality of person that is greater than one would expect in a market of this size. As a resident of Billings, I have the confidence that no matter what the condition, our facilities and our bald, paunchy, middle-aged and dumpy providers are as good as anyone else's. And at least from what I can tell, so are the hairpieces.

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