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Plastic Surgery: A red nose may be useful for that certain reindeer

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The condition characterized by a large, porous, bulbous, and red nose is known as rhinophyma. Rhinophyma is thought to be a type of rosacea. Rosacea is a common condition characterized by symptoms of facial flushing and a spectrum of clinical signs, including redness, spidery veins, coarseness of skin, and an in eruption resembling acne. Rhinophyma means a big, red, lumpy sort of nose, which can be most distressing to the owner.

Before discussing the medical and surgical treatment of rosacea, I feel I must comment on the dirty little secret that is Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer. As you know, Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer had a very shiny nose. All of the other reindeer, presumably Dasher and Dancer and their homies, used to laugh and call him names. They never let poor Rudolf join in any reindeer games. Those facts are public record.

This reflects an extremely insensitive and intolerant attitude on the part of the supposedly sweet and cute reindeer that deliver presents to our children. Apart from being morally repugnant, does the ostracizing of a member of a particular constituency on the basis of a physical feature not constitute a violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act?

Santa's lawyers, themselves all very short guys with pointed ears, point out that the North Pole is not under American jurisdiction, but the Justice Department has countered by saying that since Santa

delivers toys in the United States, he is obligated to comply. So far, the incoming Obama administration has taken no position on the issue, as it is still unsure whether Santa was involved in the Illinois Senate situation.

And where was Santa in all this? What did he know and when did he know it? Certainly the fact that Rudolf was continually harassed, so much that someone wrote a song about it, indicates a pattern of systemic abuse. So either Santa knew about it and looked the other way, or is this a Santa who is simply out of touch? Either scenario is chilling.

Then one foggy Christmas Eve, Santa came to say, "Rudolf with your nose so bright, won't you guide my sleigh tonight?" Now all of a sudden Rudolf is useful. Maybe Santa was seeing two sleighs, or they don't call him Blitzen for nothing, but I suspect there was a big settlement that night, because now all the reindeer love him. But do they love Rudolf, really, or just suck up to him because Santa has thrown the big red furry arm of endorsement around him?

Remember, this guy is coming down your chimney. You can bet that whenever some TV preacher gets caught in an overly intensive counseling session with a stripper that it will be all over CNN, but Santa allows frat-house-style hazing and gets a pass. Go figure. Anyway, I just wanted to get that off my chest.

The causes of rosacea, and rhinophyma, the nasal manifestation, are unknown. Speculation has centered around abnormalities in the dermis, such that normal fluids and bacteria are not normally cleared away. There is excessive dilation of blood vessels. Certain types of bacteria are found in excess in rhinophyma. It may be that exposure to harsh climates, actinic radiation (too much sun), or exposure to chemicals, spicy foods, and alcohol have a role. There is a stereotypical association of a big red nose and alcoholism that has only a partial basis in fact.

Rhinophyma can be treated with topical retinoids such as Retin-A, which help with the turnover of abnormal cells. Antibiotics such as tetracycline are sometimes useful. For very bulbous noses, surgical therapy such as laser ablation or direct excision can significantly

improve the shape and appearance of the nose. These treatments are helpful but not curative.

Rosacea, and its nasal component rhinophyma, can be distressing and uncomfortable conditions. If you have unusual redness or porosity on your face, and are developing a lot of spider veins on the face or nose, you should consult your provider to make sure of the diagnosis and to rule out more serious conditions.

I have nothing against Santa, really. I'm sure it was just a mistake that every time I wrote him a letter and asked for a G.I. Joe action figure he sent me a Ken doll. Real funny. Just wait until he asks me for some liposuction.

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