

Cosmetic surgery, previously only thought within reach of the rich and famous, has become affordable over the years. Nowadays, this type of medical procedure is infinitely more accessible to the average Tokyoite.

And since at no other time have people been so interested in their appearance, courting the expert advice of a cosmetic surgeon is more than ever an increasing proclivity of today's image-conscious public. But who amongst us are the ones actually having our blemishes removed, our skin rejuvenated, our eyes made brighter? Discovering the answers to questions like these is best done, of course, by visiting one of Tokyo's very best surgeries, Tokyo Skin Clinic. And that is precisely what Tokyo Journal did when we met with Doctors Yuri Okabe and René du Cloo.



Doctor Yuri Okabe

TJ: So, is whether or not to come to a clinic about lifestyle choices? Sleeping well, getting to bed early, not smoking. Or is it purely for reasons of health that people visit your clinic? Or perhaps it's more for beauty purposes? What's the ratio here, and also the ratio of foreigners to Japanese?

Dr. O: It's a good question. And it's very difficult to draw a line in dermatology. Reason being, skin problems are always associated with a person's physical appearance. Motivation is really individual and ratios, consequently, are really difficult to predict. What is for sure is that we feel, as cosmetic surgeons, that cosmetic surgery is happiness medicine. The result should be a patient's good feeling, a happy feeling, right?

“Cosmetic surgery is happiness medicine. The result should be a patient's good feeling.”

about beauty. To return to your question regarding ratios, the ratio of foreigners in Japan who come on account of cosmetic and non-cosmetic problems, well, I would say it would be half and half, I suppose. But, as for Japanese patients, I think more patients come for cosmetic purposes.

Dr. C: Almost 100%. Since we are not accepting Japanese national health insurance because this type of insurance doesn't recognize or even consider the fact that the treatment of skin blemishes, moles, freckles, etc. is a health requirement — it is thought of solely as being a cosmetic procedure — then yes, we receive many clients for cosmetic alterations because of this insurance stipulation. If we then talk about client ratios, well, at our clinic this is approximately three foreigners to one Japanese person.

TJ: With regard to expatriated foreign residents, do you find that they visit Tokyo Skin Clinic because of the effects of climate change on their skin?

cosmetic surgery:

by Dr D. Vice



Doctor René du Cloo

Tokyo Journal: Let's start at the beginning: how have you both seen cosmetic surgery evolve?

Dr. Yuri Okabe: Well, in the past, everybody wanted to do the same thing, an obvious favorite being eyelid crease formation, etc. It was trendy. Now, though, people tend to choose something more individualized, more true to themselves. Like if they're satisfied with one thing, they don't want to change it.

“Many people come for something purely dermatological, like an itch. Then they see that there are also other things wrong, so they stay for other things.”

Dr. René du Cloo: You know, in terms of beauty there are no standards these days. In the past, because people thought there was a standard to follow, people who had cosmetic surgery started looking alike. But this has been changing and people's requirements are now more specific to themselves. Interestingly, too, many people come to us for something purely dermatological, like an itch, but then they see that there are also other things wrong, so they stay for further treatment.

Dr. O: Right. Often they come for health-related skin problems, real problems, and not for beauty purposes — it's not specifically

I mean, the extreme seasonal differences in the humidity of Tokyo's weather is quite a departure from the weather most expatriates are accustomed to.

Dr. C: Yes, we do, but they tend to come when it's already pretty late in terms of the state of their condition. If your skin is a little bit dry, it's not really bothersome, right? If it gets so dry, it could easily itch, peel or even scar as a result of too much scratching, and then when they come for advice, this then becomes insufficient — at this stage what they need is medication. We can advise clients, in this case, about various soaps which they could employ and certain moisturisers they could use. Alternatively, we can supply them with our own course of medication. The crucial thing is that the person understands what is important in the maintenance of healthy skin.



TJ: Do you ever try any new stuff, any new procedures on yourselves?

Dr. C: (Laughing) Sometimes. But not so frequently.

Dr. O: Not really . . . hmmm, yeah sometimes. It is always good to know what kind of effects new treatments have.

TJ: You're trained as ordinary physicians, too, right? I mean, you've both completed all your medical studies in all disciplines?

Dr. C: Indeed. And especially as there are now many women's and also men's magazines on the subject.

Dr. O: You know, more and more people are finding themselves with increasing amounts of disposable income, especially so here in industrialized Japan. That's why surgery is no longer limited to special kinds of people. And, progressively more career women have started to undergo plastic surgery because they actually need it for business — and they

Dr. C: Two to one, men in favor of women. Maybe it's because of the age group of our patients. Many women in their 20s and 30s are very skinny, very slim. Conversely, men in their 30s start getting extra fat in this area (pointing to his waist) which they don't like, so they end up coming for liposuction.

TJ: And Botox, what is that?

Dr. O: It is a botulinum toxin. Botox is actually a brand name, an American product.

all comers welcome

Dr. O: When we were in the Netherlands, we were trained basically as primary care physicians, general practitioners.

TJ: General doctors, in other words.

Dr. O: Yeah. (Laughing) We're trained as cosmetic surgeons here in Japan, though, and we call ourselves cosmetic surgeons.

TJ: Is Tokyo Skin Clinic only for the rich and famous or can anybody join the party?

Dr. C: Some people spend a lot of money on their car or on their dreams. But some people prefer to spend their money on their looks. It's not solely a matter of having inordinate sums of money.

TJ: If people are increasingly prepared these days to indulge in cosmetic surgery, then one could imagine that they are already quite knowledgeable about the latest developments in this field?

are not so rich or special. For example, let's take collagen injections, which have been on the market for what, fifteen years now? This practice is no longer exclusively the preserve of Hollywood stars. In fact, it has been very popularized.

Dr. C: Probably in Japan, it was always more for everybody anyway.

Dr. O: Especially for body contouring. I mean, for breast augmentation and so forth. That has been a very common procedure.

TJ: Do many people come for liposuction?

Dr. C: From the early '90s, a new kind of liposuction technique and equipment was introduced when it became possible to do it in such a way as to preclude general anesthesia. You can do it very locally now, in fact. So, it's actually quite a light procedure nowadays.

Dr. O: I think there are many men having it done, in fact. Actually, quite youngish men.

TJ: What does it achieve?

Dr. O: It's for forehead lines and frowning lines on the face. If you contract certain muscles, then you get lines perpendicular to these muscles. With the botulinum toxin, the muscles are selectively paralyzed - well, temporarily paralyzed - because the muscle force eventually returns. The effect lasts from three to six months. And while the muscles are not working, you don't get lines. This is especially effective for a smooth forehead and is naturally quite popular.

TJ: Do you also, as a cosmetic surgeon, provide counselling and discuss with your clients the effects that any cosmetic surgery will have on them?

Dr. O: This is very important and before we do any major surgery we have long talks with our patients. But with most of the simple procedures we perform at our clinic, you can undergo treatment anytime you like. **TJ**