



Fat-Melting Mayhem

"Piece of cake..." "I could not be happier..." "Did not hurt whatsoever..." Who is saying this about the fat-melting shots called lipodissolve? You may be surprised.

BY JOAN KRON

Women who read "Fat Chance" [*Allure*, November], about fat-melting injections, may be surprised to learn that employees working for some clinics that offer the controversial fat-melting shots lipodissolve have been submitting positive reviews about the experience on the Internet. RealSelf.com, a skin-care and cosmetic surgery website, received these submissions, and alerted *Allure*.

Lipodissolve uses chemicals that are not FDA-approved for injection under the skin. The Kansas State Board of Healing Arts tried to greatly restrict its use this summer, after receiving numerous complaints. (Its use is already prohibited in Brazil and Canada—and doctors using the lipodissolve procedure in the United Kingdom can no longer seek malpractice coverage from the Medical Protection Society.) In an October 9, 2007 news release issued by the St. Louis Better Business Bureau, where 90 complaints about lipodissolve have been received this year, the BBB stated that complainants "allege the procedure is ineffective and caused swelling and pain," and that Fig (formerly known as Advanced Lipo Dissolve), a major chain of lipodissolve clinics, made it difficult for them to "obtain refunds."

Essentially, lipodissolve clinics are practicing "human experimentation, due to the lack of significant data to support the claims to the consumer," says Rod Rohrich, chief of plastic surgery at the University of Texas, Southwest Medical Center.

Meanwhile, the editors of RealSelf.com received approximately 109 comments on the treatment—61 percent of which are negative; 39 percent positive. RealSelf.com suspected that several of the positive submissions might have been written by the people at companies that offer lipodissolve. A trace of computer IP addresses then revealed that the majority of these statements stemmed from employees of Fig, and a few came from employees of another lipodissolve clinic, MedSculpt. Both are clinics with multiple locations in the United States.

When asked to respond to these accusations, Fig's chief marketing officer, Rob Marandino, sent *Allure* a statement dated October 23, 2007, saying, "Several months ago, it became clear that current and prospective lipodissolve patients were actively utilizing the online space to post queries about the procedure, treatment expectations, and their own personal experiences. Many Fig employees and satisfied Fig patients responded to queries to provide accurate information about the procedure, address concerns, and share their own experiences.

"We quickly realized, through numerous conversations with the editorial staff of RealSelf.com that although some Fig employees were appropriately representing themselves and their professional affiliation, others were not. This clearly violates our company's online communications policy, which ensures transparency and accuracy, and all employees were reminded of our stringent guidelines. To our knowledge, this situation was resolved, and Fig employees are properly representing ourselves in online posts...We will continue to work with RealSelf.com to ensure that we are meeting its terms of use."

MedSculpt Chief Executive Officer Gary F. Jonas emailed *Allure* on October 24, 2007, saying, "It was not the intention of any of our employees to mislead the public in any way, and as of today, we will send out a policy statement indicating that any blog posting by them should indicate that they are currently a [MedSculpt] employee—even if their treatments may have occurred prior to employment...I can assure you that any subsequent submission to blogs will state that they are employees."

The bottom line: No matter what these companies' policies state, potential lipodissolve patients have no way of verifying the authenticity of any user-generated post about the procedure they read online—so they should be skeptical. In fact, visitors' reactions on RealSelf.com demonstrate that people are often "suspicious of glowingly positive reviews," says Eric Kennedy, head of product for the site.

To learn more about lipodissolve, read "Fat Chance" in the November issue of *Allure*, and the ASAPS's warning about fat-melting injections