

[Back](#)

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Q&A »

Doctors on hand at medical spas

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For the News-Leader

This week's expert: Dr. N. Eugene Morrow has been a dermatologist since 1982. He has been the owner and medical director of Seasons Medical Spa in Springfield since 2003. He is a fellow of the American Society of Cosmetic Dermatology and Aesthetic Surgery. He researched some of his answers through the American Academy of Dermatology, medicalsapaassociation.org and spafinder.com.

Q. What is the difference between a medical spa and a regular spa? Is there a difference in the types of treatments offered?

A. A medical spa is a facility that operates under the full-time, on-site supervision of a licensed health-care professional, according to The International Medical Spa Association, but there are no definitive regulations governing the use of the term "medical spa."

Medical spas focus on intense treatments that make a significant improvement to the individual's appearance, without the down-time associated with more invasive procedures. Medical spas may use lasers and intense pulsed light technology, as well as medical microdermabrasion, photofacials, Botox and Juvéderm injections, medical peels and other medical-aesthetic procedures. These are procedures that may be used for skin tightening, permanent hair removal, wrinkle reduction, acne treatment and the fading of brown spots, freckles, pigment irregularities, rosacea and redness.

Medical spas may incorporate other services found in regular spas, such as waxing, massage, make-up, manicures, pedicures, body wraps, soaks and hair-salon services.

Q. Should clients see a difference between the two types of spas?

A. The first thing a client should notice about a medical spa is the supervision of a licensed health-care professional. Both medical spas and regular spas may employ licensed aestheticians, massage therapists or cosmetologist, but regular spas do not typically have supervision from a licensed health-care professional.

In Missouri, the laws that regulate the use of laser and other intense pulse light technology are rather vague. The consumer must take the initiative and examine the credentials of the health-care professional who supervises the medical spa. Is the supervising health-care professional a medical doctor? How long has the supervising professional studied skin and skin care? Is he or she actively involved on-site on a full-time basis or just an absentee supervisor? What type of assistance is available if you experience unwanted side effects from your treatment?

Another difference should be in the professional atmosphere of the spa. Although medical spas strive to offer a relaxing and comfortable "spa-like" ambiance, they do so in a more clinical environment. Client confidentiality should be a foremost concern. Medical spa personnel should be highly trained and put the client at ease.

Also, because of the intense nature of treatments, the medical spa should provide an in-depth skin analysis and consultation before the treatments. They should use a more thorough intake form and initial interview than a regular spa. Usually the client will sign consents before receiving laser treatments, chemical peels or Botox or Juvéderm injections. Most medical spas offer a free consultation before major treatments. A physician should be available for pre-treatment consultation, if necessary.

Q. How long have medical spas been around? In your experience, do people generally know what a medical spa is?

A. Spa-going has been practiced for thousands of years; people originally gathered for social bathing in "healing

waters." The first day spa, Manhattan's Red Door Salon, was introduced by Elizabeth Arden in 1910 and focused on beauty and relaxation. By 1997, U.S. doctors began to introduce "medical spas," which combine medical and spa services.

The term "medical spa" is rather nebulous, but most people seem to have an understanding of what it means. Most of our clients choose our spa because they know we will combine the pampering aspects of a traditional spa with the treatments of a medical spa to achieve the results they desire. They are serious about their skin and enjoy the safety of treatment in a dermatologist's office.

Q. What are the most common treatments at your spa?

A. A facial, customized to the individual needs of the client, is the treatment we do most often. A regular monthly facial may relieve stress and, when combined with proper home care, may soften lines, reduce blemishes and renew skin. During a facial, the skin is cleansed, exfoliated and hydrated, and appropriate serums and masks are applied.

Permanent laser hair removal is our most popular treatment. Excessive or unwanted facial or body hair is a common problem for women and men. After a few treatments, clients may no longer have to contend with razor stubble, ingrown hairs or folliculitis.

The medical spa also features injectable treatments for wrinkles, including Botox and Juvéderm.
