



COSMETIC SURGERY UNCUT

The pressure to look good has turned the UAE into a global cosmetic surgery destination. But at what cost? VIVA explores the true price of beauty...

Joan Rivers once joked she'd had so much cosmetic surgery, doctors had used all the parts they took off her and made a tiny little person that she now carries around. It's the kind of obsession – if not candidness – we've come to expect of celebrities. But, if recent statistics are anything to go by, the UAE may be catching up with the stars...

When it began in 1984, the GCC Association of Plastic Surgeons boasted 30 professionals as members. Today membership exceeds 300, with more than 1,000 cosmetic surgery clinics operating in the region. And, as any cosmetic convert will tell you, looking good doesn't come cheap: Dhs300million was spent on surgeries in the UAE last year, according to a report by *Al Ittihad* newspaper, with liposuction and botox topping patients' wish lists. The stats are startling: 1.27million liposuction procedures and 3.18million botox procedures took place in the UAE in 2011 alone, according to an annual report by the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ISAPS).

Such numbers have not only placed the Emirates on par with leading cosmetic surgery destinations the world over, they've encouraged top surgeons to up sticks from London, India, France and South America to meet the mania head on.

Dr Allen Rezai, M.D. of the Elite Plastic and Cosmetic Surgery Group, is one of them. Prompted by "high demand" he recently opened a second clinic in Dubai, the first being in London's capital of cosmetic surgery, Harley Street. "Many of our international patients visiting our London practice came from the GCC seeking advice and treatment," recalls Dr Rezai. "Since the launch, we have consulted and treated patients from all states of the GCC, coming to Dubai solely for the purpose of receiving their desired treatment."

Do requests here differ to London? "Middle Eastern women mainly are interested in procedures such as rhinoplasty (nose jobs) and body contouring (liposuction and tummy tucks), whereas western women prefer breast surgeries, mainly breast enlargement." Meanwhile, botox, fillers, peels and skin-resurfacing are, Dr Rezai says, "popular among all women, regardless of culture and nationality".

**"I'VE SPENT
DHS200,000
ON SURGERY"**



British-born Gail Clough, 47, tells VIVA why surgery is her saviour

"I see beauty as a commodity – it just makes life easier. I've had a nose job, liposuction, eye lift, botox, fillers and fat transfer: a lot of people feel like they have to justify surgery, but I have no problem saying which procedures I've had done. It's difficult to calculate the actual amount, but I would say I've spent around Dhs200,000.

My first procedure was my nose. I was 17. Back then surgery was a big taboo and my GP refused to sign a note to say I was fit for it. But I was so determined. At the end of the day, if you want something done you'll do it, one way or another.

Having my nose done gave me such confidence: I was a teenager and soon after went off to travel the world as a DJ. Without it, I wouldn't have felt brave enough to tackle it.

Not everyone defines themselves by their appearance, but I have always seen looks as being important for my work as a DJ, and now as Laughter Factory compere and cosmetic surgery advisor for the Dubai Surgery as well.

It was decades later that I had more work done, but when I did it was a case of having one thing and wanting another! You see improvements in yourself and it just goes from there.

I like to maintain my looks so that I still get booked and they have proved a massive asset. I've been in Dubai for 20 years now – I

think it's a beautiful place and the gorgeous people help decorate it. But Dubai is also a very transient place, so people have to create a strong first impression.

In my experience, there's a big difference between good and bad surgery. I read that women spend more time choosing a handbag than a surgeon. Surgery is like buying a dress; you have the good, the bad and lots in the middle. You can buy a dress from Galliano or from Next. There's nothing wrong with Next, but I wanted Galliano.

My aim was always to improve my looks, not to look younger. I don't have kids and am not in a relationship either. I am just who I am: an attractive, middle-aged, spinster who loves getting older! What I have done is to look good for me and no one else. Now I love the way I look and at the moment I don't plan to have anything else done – just my botox every four months!

www.dubaisurgery.com

'Women in Dubai are involved in every industry and at the forefront. This makes them very competitive and self-conscious'

New levels of expertise have cued first-time procedures in the UAE too, such as Dr Rezai's 'Vampire Facelift' or 'True Blood' rejuvenation, where blood is taken from a patient and "centrifuged to separate the red blood cells from the plasma (PRP)" before being re-injected, resulting in "skin tightening and overall rejuvenation".

To some of us it will sound gruesome. To others, the perfect solution to a lacklustre look. "Women in Dubai are very enterprising and dynamic," says Dr Sanjay

Parashar, CEO of Dubai's Coccoona clinic. "They are involved in every industry and at the forefront. This makes them very competitive and self-conscious."

It's a profile that European expat Sam* fits, undergoing breast augmentation largely due to her role as a fitness guru. "I don't want clients to think I look like a boy, I want to have appeal and look feminine," she tells VIVA. "It's very glamorous here in Dubai – the look is not natural. It's also a very young city and for me, being nearly 40, you are competing with much younger women."

It's a mindset that psychologist Dr Tara Wyne of LightHouse Arabia is no stranger to. "Research tells us that attractive people do better in the workplace and are more confident romantically. It is no surprise that this, coupled with a woman's critical inner voice, means that we seek to change ourselves." Not only that, says Wyne, but

an altered attitude towards surgery in recent years makes it a 'quick fix' answer to our problems. "The availability and marketing of cosmetic procedures, and the attention celebrities receive when they have successful procedures, heavily influences the average woman's thoughts," she says. "Surgery has now become a commonplace choice for improving our looks and therefore our lives."

While Sam opted for the crème de la crème of Dubai's clinics – "I thought, it's my body, I'm not going to go down a cheap route" – the highest price for beauty often comes from cutting corners.

Take the two Omani sisters who approached Dr Rezai after botched procedures at the hands of a poorly skilled surgeon in the Middle East. "They had had breast augmentation surgery and both ended up with synmastia".

The botched results meant that each of the girl's implants met in the middle of their chest, giving the appearance of just one breast.

'Problems arise, usually, when people go to unauthorised persons operating from non-medical facilities because the cost of surgery is cheaper'

Graver still, in 2008, a 27-year-old Emirati woman who paid Dhs90,000 for liposuction died as a result of complications within a matter of days, while another was left in a coma following a facelift and liposuction. But few cases compare to that of the discredited Steven Moos, an American doctor who was jailed in 2010. A Dubai Court heard how, posing as a Hollywood surgeon, he butchered women during bogus surgeries conducted on the kitchen table of his flat in Dubai using, patients claimed, unsterilised kitchen utensils. The price? Just Dhs500 in cash – and a lifetime of scars.

"I think it is important to understand that the problem usually arises when people go to unauthorised persons operating from homes or other non-

medical facilities because the cost of cosmetic surgery is cheaper," commented Dr Layla Al Marzouqi, Director of Health Regulation at the Dubai Health Authority. "We have raised awareness of this several times to ensure people only seek treatment from licensed medics that have proper facilities. This is absolutely essential to protect the health of the patient."

For women who are willing to pay the high cost of improving their looks, there is more to consider than cost. "A bad indication is when patients want to undergo surgery to please someone else," warns Brazilian plastic surgeon Dr Luiz

Toledo, who practices in Dubai. "The most frequent reason I refuse to operate on a patient is when someone says to me 'my husband left me and I want to look good so he can come back'. Husbands do not come back because of plastic surgery."

And if you are a sister 'doing it for yourself', Dr Tara has one warning. "Cosmetic surgery cannot act as a quick fix for our self-esteem. It should not be considered as a cure for all our body and emotional issues or our social success. As a respect to your own body, push yourself to look for both evidence for and against having surgery." ●

