



THIS CAN HAPPEN TO YOU

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Background

Ladies and gentlemen, imagine being able to allow yourselves a few extra minutes of sleep or some additional time to peruse the news in the mornings before heading to the office. Wouldn't it be nice to NOT have the hassle of putting on make-up or combing your hair just so – to cover up that thinning pate?

Well, such scenarios can, indeed, be dreams come true: Permanent Cosmetics (PC), also known as cosmetic tattooing, can alleviate some of your morning's time crunch. But before you dash out to the neighborhood beauty salon which also offers PC services, please consider the following: 1) A fledgling tattoo artist usually has to apprentice with a knowledgeable tattooist for a minimum of 2 years, and in that time period most apprentices are not allowed to tattoo until after their 1st year.

2) On the other hand, a cosmetologist undergoes training for 1 – 2 months to learn how to apply inks onto (into) a client's face, for example: to darken or shape eyebrows; to outline, shape or color the lips; to outline the eyes; to fill in bald areas of the scalp.

There really are many good practitioners of cosmetology out there doing PC work. However, one should be cautious of those who offer "rock bottom" prices or of convenient procedures performed in an acquaintance's home or that of a friend. Otherwise, the chasing of dreams to gain more time and beauty can turn into a nightmare without end.

Case-In-Point

SF Environmental Health recently received a complaint of an infection arising from a cosmetic tattooing procedure. The customer had undergone permanent lip coloring procedures and she is one of 3 women who had gotten infected. She recalled that several ladies were waiting their turns with her, in a friend's house, for the practitioner to work on outlining and / or "filling in" their lips. She also noted that the practitioner was personable and friendly. However, this woman did not remember seeing the PC person wash her hands, change the bowl of water or change the needle in her tattoo gun between clients. At any rate, this customer wasn't concerned about any of that at the time.

It wasn't until later, when her lips became swollen, hot and sore that she began to worry. She rushed to her doctor and, fortunately for her, the infection was caught in its early stage. With the use of antibiotic cream, the condition cleared within a few days, leaving a minor discoloration to the lips.

One of the other ladies waited a bit longer before seeking medical attention; her disfiguration was more severe following treatment – because the infection had spread from the lips to the rest of the mouth.

This and similar complaints are difficult to resolve because of these following reasons:

- 1) The practitioners are extremely mobile.
- 2) No information other than a cell phone number is available.
- 3) English is not the PC practitioner's native language.
- 4) Practitioners rely on the vulnerability of their clients to avoid being reported to authorities. To strengthen their hold on customers, who are predominantly ethnic minorities, they offer cut-rate prices for services and they glibly promise to provide the same quality of finished product – that is, timely beauty – as that of an established salon.
- 5) Clients are obtained by word-of-mouth through friends and

acquaintances within the community. This way of doing business further serves to strengthen the practitioner's implied respectability and competency.

Desired outcomes of Permanent Cosmetics, however, are tied to the use of aseptic techniques. Regrettably, the PC worker in this case did not change the bowl of water used to clean each client's face nor the changeable needle in the tattooing gun. She thought, erroneously, that wiping the instrument down with alcohol would be enough.



Herpes infection of the lips – the mouth was shaped and outlined with black ink; the lips were “filled out” with red ink. Inks were re-used from previous clients and thus became contaminated. Note herpes blisters on lips and mouth. All tattoos shift, or “fade,” after a while. “Permanent” cosmetics require reapplication usually within 6 years – sooner, if the tattooed areas receive frequent exposure to sun or salt water.

Safety Tips: What To Look For

So, if you should hear of or get invited to a tattoo or “lip” party at someone's house, keep these following points in mind before you reply, “Yes, I'll come:”

- a) The practitioner's work area and the “set-up” must be clean and well-lit. An adequate bleach solution or other antimicrobial mixture is used to wipe down the area and set-up prior to customer service and especially in-between clients.
- b) The practitioner takes the time to tell the customer everything he/she needs to know about the procedure, the types of possible reactions resulting from tattooing, after-care recommendations. She is willing and able to answer ALL PC-related questions.
- c) The practitioner uses sterilized or pre-packaged clean needles for each client.
- d) The practitioner uses gloves. At a minimum, the practitioner must wash her hands before putting on clean, new gloves between clients and after touching “unclean” surfaces such as her face, clothes and hair.
- e) The practitioner throws away anything that touches the floor, furniture, parts of the body other than her hands ... contaminated items must not come in contact with the client's face.

In Conclusion

Be aware. Be safe. Enjoy your new look – and the extra few minutes in the morning to do “whatever.” ?