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Special Advertising Section January 17, 2010

[special report: liposuction]

With the recent death of a man after liposuction, Tan Dawn Wei and Debby Kwong talk to doctors in this controversial multimillion-dollar industry



FAT TAKINGS

Every year, thousands of women — and increasingly men — subject themselves to liposuction at a clinic or hospital but in a bid to attain an enviable, youth figure.

This surgical procedure to remove fat through suction is a burgeoning multimillion-dollar industry, but not one without risks. In the recent death of property lord (see page 10) Franklin Heng for example.

While details of what caused his death have not been revealed, it has been widely speculated that he had complications from a liposuction procedure he had in the last few years, based on the subject of such formal debates that has split the industry between and with the Ministry of Health's (MOH) version of intervention.

Close the industry's demand for plastic surgeons, general practitioners (GPs) have been getting in on the act, lured by the good money to be made. Liposuction is part of a rapidly growing \$300-million-a-year aesthetic industry here.

Though few such quick fixes have been on the rise, doctors reported, lured by the media, advertisements in medical journals and aggressive marketing by clinics and liposuction equipment distributors.

While there are no statistics on how many liposuction procedures are done here each year, it is estimated that the number could reach 1,000 in 2010.

The MOH Accreditation Committee on Liposuction has issued 15 guidelines to protect liposuction patients and to ensure they are aware of the risks of the procedure. It also issued 11 on plastic surgeons.

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leaked from 11 puncture wounds left by the liposuction tubes. The autopsy ruled that the death from acute tuberculous meningitis. Tuberculous meningitis is a severe infection which spreads from a lung infection.

New procedures But not everyone is overly concerned, especially those new-generation methods. The ultrasonic-assisted and water-assisted liposuction have produced less invasive surgeries that are supposedly safer and come with less downtime.

Dr David Tan, medical director at the Singapore Liposuction Centre, said his patients typically go back to work in one to two weeks.

"I even had a young man do 5kg of liposuction and he was back to his computer working away," said Dr Tan. He does liposuction at an accredited day surgery centre where he performs more than one litre of fat.

One of his liposuction clients is 34-year-old Tan Yee, who had liposuction on her upper and lower abdomen which she did monthly. The cumulative weight of fat removed is 12,000g — a total compared to the 10,000g she would have had in one of a single surgery, she said.

The 1.55m-tall woman, who weighs 50 kg, went through a two-hour surgery and even went to a 14th floor club.

The body painkillers took a day, but in a liposuction centre for a month and visits to the clinic at the same month — not then, but in two weeks, she said.

Dr Tan said he is not aware of any complications from liposuction, but he suggests that GPs and specialists in general medicine may not be equipped to handle the procedure. MOH will now guide doctors who need to refer patients to doctors who need to perform liposuction in a hospital.

They also had to satisfy other requirements such as having at least one year of surgical training, following their licensing, plus training in the procedure.

Those who choose to do treatment in a clinic must also have medical staff to monitor related patients, and use trained staff to perform liposuction.

Some of the risks and complications of liposuction, and this is in terms of losing people to HIV, is in the hope of finding an even solution, said Dr Andrew Tan, consultant plastic surgeon at The Plastic Surgery Practice.

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Plastic surgeon Tan Ying Chien (left) performed liposuction on aesthetic doctor Siew Tuck Wah earlier this month. They both work at The Sloane Clinic.

"Liposuction — say from a purely a sculpting look. And it is only best for small areas like love handles."

The invasive surgery involves suctioning out fat from the body. It is a cosmetic procedure that is used to remove fat from the body. It is a cosmetic procedure that is used to remove fat from the body.

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COSTS AND TYPES

Liposuction is a procedure where a body is sculpted by removing excess fat. The most common includes the arms, abdomen, buttocks, thighs and calves.

Cost starts at \$2,000 when it is done by general practitioners and \$4,000 when it is done by plastic surgeons.

Patients also have to pay for pre-operative tests, post-operative compression garments, antibiotics and other drugs. The use of operating theatre facilities and anaesthetics' fees add \$1,500 on average.

There are at least four types of liposuction available:
Traditional suction-assisted liposuction This involves a doctor using a cannula to

probe the fat cells until they are broken into tiny molecules that can then be sucked out.

Water-assisted liposuction This is commonly the most popular form of liposuction here. The same cannula used to probe fat cells is used to dissolve the fat before sucking it out.

Ultrasound-assisted liposuction This is a form of laser-assisted liposuction which melts the fat. It is usually used for smaller areas like the chin.

High water pressure is used to change the cells before they are sucked out. The water spray delivers anaesthetics directly to the targeted area.

Do you get fats removed too

A day before news broke about Singapore's first liposuction-related death, Dr Siew Tuck Wah was getting his fat sucked from his abdomen by his colleague, plastic surgeon Tan Ying Chien.

It was all in a day's work for both men. All physicians at The Sloane Clinic, where they both work, have to undergo all treatments on offer at the aesthetic clinic so they have "a patient's perspective", said Dr Siew, a general practitioner who performs non-invasive and minimally invasive procedures such as injecting Botox and fillers.

"This means that our treatment protocols are fine-tuned to increase a patient's efficacy and comfort."

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last year, he has undergone a facelift, Botox for wrinkles and Smoothbeam laser to control his acne.

His liposuction — his first — sounded like something of a non-event: He had 300ml of fat taken out in surgery that took two hours using Vaser ultrasound-assisted liposuction.

By afternoon, he was back at work, with some mild aches on his abdomen.

Exercise and dieting have not helped get rid of his love handles. The single doctor, who is in his mid-30s, works out at the gym up to four times a week; running and doing weight training for up to two hours each time.

"I think that because I am a physician, I am more cautious than most people as I am fully aware of all the possible risks," he said.

"Every surgical procedure will carry with it some amount of risk, but this can be minimised by choosing a qualified surgeon who is highly skilled yet takes into account patient safety and comfort."

Dr Tan, whose liposuction fees start from \$4,500, sees an average of seven cases a week.

He said that he sees Mr Franklin Heng's death as a small setback for the industry.

"However, I hope we as doctors can all learn from it, fine-tune and improve our processes and techniques so that surgical procedures will be made safer for the good of all patients."

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'More painful than giving birth'

When news broke that a man had died following a liposuction procedure, Dr Siew Tuck Wah said it was "more painful than giving birth".

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Singaporeans behind India's obesity epidemic? Study shows that per cent of the top and back. The rest is gone. Botox, fillers and I. And of all obesity cases, 10 per cent are due to the fact that they are not eating right. So forget that for now.