

face-lifts for a RECESSION

by: SHELLY EMILING | september 9, 2009

cosmetic surgery could help older workers compete for scarce jobs



Cosmetic Surgery: A Costly Option

Here are average costs* for selected plastic surgery procedures, including fees for the surgeon, operating room, anesthesia and any implants involved, performed in an accredited hospital, surgery center or plastic surgery office.

Face-lift	\$7 - 9,000
Breast augmentation (silicone)	\$6 - 8,000
Tummy tuck	\$6 - 8,000
Liposuction (three areas)	\$5.5 - 7,000
Nose reshaping	\$5 - 6,000
Eyelid tuck (upper and lower)	\$4 - 5,500
Dermabrasion	\$2 - 4,000

*Figures apply across U.S. with exception of New York City area (50% higher).

Source: Jean Loftus, M.D., author of *The Smart Woman's Guide to Plastic Surgery*

After nearly 20 years in the insurance industry, Karen Albanese suddenly lost her job last December. Her prospects for finding another position in the same field were slim. So she decided to switch careers and become a medical technician.

"People told me that the health field was the best field to get into if you want to find work," says the New York City resident.

But as she began training how to take blood from patients, a new challenge ambushed her: her age.

"Everybody training with me was a lot younger," the 62-year-old says. "One of them looked like my son. One person asked me why I didn't just stay home and collect Social Security."

Albanese says she felt out of place, as if she had no right to be there. And that's when she experienced a light-bulb moment: Why not get a face-lift? With her family's encouragement, she quickly decided to do it—and the result was everything she hoped for.

"I got the face-lift in April and it took 15 years off my life," she says. "I really feel people look at me differently in the workplace.

"It's giving me a lot more confidence, and it makes me feel as

though I'm in the same age range as those around me who are in their 40s and 50s and who will be competing with me for the same positions," she says.

Even though cosmetic surgery has its drawbacks, including high cost and possible complications, Albanese is not alone in wanting to put her best face forward.

many women open to surgery

This year the American Society of Plastic Surgeons released a survey showing a sizable number of American women of all ages are considering cosmetic surgery in order to gain an advantage in the workplace.

The ASPS surveyed 756 women between the ages of 18 and 64. About 13 percent said they would consider having a cosmetic medical procedure to bolster their confidence and make them more competitive in the job market.

About 3 percent said they already had a cosmetic procedure for that reason, while 73 percent said they believed that appearance and youthfulness play a role in getting a job or a promotion, especially in the midst of a recession.

Cosmetic surgery is clearly in the public consciousness. In an episode last spring of the TV show *Desperate Housewives*, middle-age character Tom Scavo considered a face-lift to make himself look younger when he couldn't get a job. His wife, Lynette, eventually talked him out of it by arguing that if he appeared more youthful, they would no longer look like a couple. (He got the job anyway.)

Although the recession has affected the country's cosmetic surgery industry—revenues were down 9 percent to \$10.3 billion in 2008—interest in the procedures appears to be growing among those out of work, seeking a promotion or trying to avoid getting laid off.

That includes older people who have been unexpectedly thrust back into the job market as stock losses whittle away at their retirement savings, fueling financial worries.

Federal statistics show it was taking workers 55 or older nearly

seven months to find a job in August, on average, about five weeks longer than those ages 25 to 34.

“We definitely have more older people coming in and asking about surgery because they think it will help them in the job market,” says Joshua Greenwald, a plastic surgeon in New York’s Westchester County. “And I believe most of the procedures we do definitely could help someone looking for employment in today’s competitive climate. Older people do this to feel better about themselves, and sometimes it translates into a better job for them,” he says.

Men get new faces, too

Michael McGuire, president-elect of the ASPS and a cosmetic surgeon in Santa Monica, Calif., says men are also seeking appearance-enhancing procedures in growing numbers.

“The fear of looking tired or not as vigorous is even more of a threat to men than it is to women, because it implies that the man is not as virile or as in charge as he used to be,” McGuire says. “Most of the men I see come in because of comments from coworkers that they are looking tired or angry or older.

“Although only 10 percent of patients (across the country) are men, the number is growing, and in a job environment like we have now, surgery has become a major factor,” McGuire says.

Surgery “won’t save their job if they aren’t competent, but it will give them more self-confidence and make them look as though they can still do the work,” he adds.

A youthful appearance is not a magic ticket to employment, but recruiters say it can help.

Alison Ryan, regional director for Executive Headhunters, an international recruitment firm based in London, says she hasn’t heard anything about plastic surgery giving people a boost in the marketplace.

“But obviously at interviews, appearance is important as people will judge you within the first few minutes of seeing you,” she says. “People can sense confidence, and if plastic surgery can give someone that confidence, then that can only be a good thing.”

Linda Mason, a television producer and photographer in Los Angeles in her 50s, says she believes the face-lift she had earlier this year will be worth it in the long run.

“I’m in an age-biased business, and you have to stay young in both looks and attitude in order to succeed,” she says. “I’m young in attitude, but recently I started seeing signs that proved I’m no longer in my 30s anymore.

“I’m constantly competing with younger people for work, and I need to look young and fresh,” she says.

Mason’s face-lift was performed by Payman Simoni, a Beverly

Hills, Calif.-based doctor known for his “wide-awake” face-lifts, which are done with only local anesthesia.

The procedure costs about \$12,000, at least \$5,000 less than one using general anesthesia.

Simoni claims the recovery time for his patients is no more than seven days and that the face-lift lasts for 10 to 15 years.

Undergoing a procedure with a reduced recovery time is vital for people who can’t afford to be off work or out of the job market for long stretches of time, he says.

The types of surgery sought by job-seeking patients varies. Some undergo complete face-lifts, in which the skin of the face is first loosened, then underlying bands of muscle and other supporting tissue are tightened before the facial skin is trimmed and stitched back into place. Other patients choose procedures that tighten the skin on the neck.

The most popular procedure among both men and women, according to some doctors, is eyelid surgery that gets rid of the puffiness and droopiness that can make people look old and tired. During the procedure, surgeons remove excess skin and fat from both the upper and lower eyelids.

“The first thing you see when you look at someone is their eyes, so this is important,” says Robert Guida, a plastic surgeon in Manhattan. “People usually start asking for this type of surgery when they are in their 40s.”

High cost just one drawback

An eyelid lift generally costs a few thousand dollars, and a full face-lift can cost as much as \$20,000—and cosmetic surgery generally is not covered by health insurance. Patients generally pay for surgery with their credit cards, bank loans, third-party loans, or through their surgeon’s own payment plans.

In addition to the cost, there can be other drawbacks. Patients can suffer from bruising or swelling, and recovery periods can sometimes go on longer than expected.

“People need to have realistic expectations,” McGuire says. “Are they convinced this will get them a job or save their job? That’s not realistic. This won’t make up for other problems.

“People have to realize that not everyone is a candidate for surgery and everyone needs to be evaluated both physically and mentally,” he says.

“This kind of surgery is not a minor undertaking,” he adds. “It’s a lot different than putting on makeup.”