



A Changing PRACTICE

SURGERY IS AN EXACTING PROCEDURE. WE OFTEN HEAR THE TERM ‘SURGICAL PRECISION.’ THE PRACTICE OF SURGERY IS ALSO A CRAFT – AN ART AND AN INTUITIVE PROCESS. HOW DR. WILLIAM HALL, CLASS OF 1992, CAME TO BUENA VISTA UNIVERSITY – AND HOW HE FOUNDED A HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL COSMETIC SURGERY PRACTICE IN SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA – WAS ITSELF A PROCESS MORE INTUITIVE THAN SCIENTIFIC; IN HIS OWN WORDS, “NOT LIKE A LIFELONG DREAM SO MUCH AS A BACKWARDS ROUTE.” IT IS BOTH A STORY OF SELF-REINVENTION AND OF THE TRANSFORMATIONS AND CHANGES IN COSMETIC MEDICINE AT THE TURN OF THE 21ST CENTURY.

DR. WILLIAM HALL M.D.

“You know, I absolutely loved Buena Vista,” says Dr. William Hall. “I didn’t think I would. When you’re 18 years old, you want to get the world by the tail. I wanted to get to the city. At first, it felt like I was going from my hometown of Algona to Algona.”

When William Hall came to BV, he was an All-State high school quarterback unsure of what he wanted to do for a career – or even what he wanted to study. “All my friends were going to large state schools,” says William, who played four sports each of his four years in high school. “I wanted to go somewhere where I knew I’d get playing time. I was not an academic. I just thought I’d take the classes as an excuse to play football.”

William’s plans changed when a knee injury ended his football career in his first and only college season. He continued to play golf for BV – becoming a member of the varsity team – and, with the help of the

faculty, directed his energies toward academics.

“It took me about a year to start taking school seriously,” says William. “When I realized I really wasn’t going to be playing sports, I started to focus on the academic subjects in which I had been most interested during high school: science, biology and chemistry. My professors were always just the kindest most nourishing teachers, especially Drs. Jerry Poff (professor emeritus of biology), Rick Lampe (professor of biology), and Jon Hutchins (professor emeritus of chemistry). Every time I ran across something I didn’t understand they were able and willing to explain it. Dr. Poff in particular gave me the encouragement every year to hang in there.”

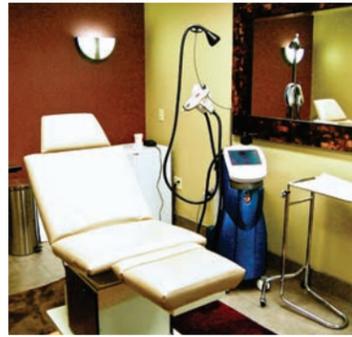
“Billy was a very good student,” says Poff. “He was fun to have around the science building. Billy and I spent a lot of time in my office and we talked a

lot about careers. As a student, he was very focused on details, and I can see how that translates into his success as a surgeon.”

“Frankly I think that was the environment I needed to excel in academics,” William says. “I would never be where I am today if I had gone to a large school. I graduated from high school with a GPA of 2.3. I graduated from BV with a 3.7.”

His senior year, William was planning a career in physical therapy. At the urging of his parents, he also took the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT). When he received good scores, he applied concurrently to physical therapy and medical schools. He chose the University of Iowa medical program. For his major residency, William sought warmer climates, interviewing exclusively in southern programs. He selected Scottsdale, Arizona, where he arrived in 1996 in the midst of a national

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aesthetic surgery boom. In *Body Work: Beauty and Image in American Culture*, author Debra Gimlin cites

statistics from the American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons stating that their board-certified surgeons performed over 2.2 million procedures in 1999, 153 percent more than they performed in 1992. Of these, nearly 231,000 were liposuction procedures, a 264 percent increase from 1992.

Bolstering the field was the rising popularity of the tumescent liposuction procedure in which he came to specialize. According to William, traditional liposuction – which involved large incisions and general anesthesia – was quite dangerous. “There were not a lot of guidelines for performing it,” he explains. “Physicians were taking off massive amounts of fat which could lead to serious fluid shifts in the body.”

Tumescent, in the medical sense, means to make firm with fluid. The tumescent procedure allows for fat to be suctioned out through a series of very small incisions. According to William, the procedure’s special anesthesia numbs the patient’s skin, fat and nerves, also helping to almost entirely eliminate bleeding and allowing the patient to remain conscious during the surgery. “Surgery is a science in that we must understand things like the medications we’re using and how they interact with the body,” says William. “After that, liposuction is all art. We’re sculpting in a medium that happens to be fat – no different from an artist working with clay – except we’re working in a much more demanding medium. To be a good cosmetic surgeon, you have to really understand proportion and the human figure. This is also why we use local anesthesia. The patient will judge the results standing up. We have to be able to stand the patient up in the sculpting process so we can adequately judge how it is going.”

“I’ve always been a proceduralist,” says William, who learned the tumescent procedure post-residency, as did many doctors at the time. “I like to work with my hands. My post-residency training opened the doors to test the waters, to see what I was talented at. I had determined that rather than be just ‘ok’ at 20 different procedures, I would rather be excellent at one.”

In 2000, he founded Infini Cosmetic Associates (www.arizonalip.com ; www.infiniskin.com), the first clinic specializing in tumescent liposuction in the Scottsdale / Phoenix area.

Then came television. TV became the face of cosmetic surgery in America in the 2000s with shows like *Nip/Tuck* (2003-current) *Dr. 90210* (2004-current) and *The Swan* (2004-05). According to Sue Tait in the article “TV and the Domestication of Plastic Surgery,” both the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS) and the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) issued statements in 2005 attributing the recent increase in cosmetic surgery’s popularity to the prominence of the television shows.

“Modern media, television and the

“PLASTIC” OR “COSMETIC”

According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the ‘plastic’ in ‘plastic surgery’ comes from the Greek *plastikos*, meaning ‘to form’ or ‘to mold.’ Today, the term ‘plastic surgery’ is often used to refer to reconstructive procedures such as grafts, facial reconstruction and cleft palate repair surgery. ‘Cosmetic surgery’ generally refers to appearance-enhancing procedures that produce primarily aesthetic results, such as liposuction, breast augmentation and assorted ‘nips’, ‘lifts’, ‘tucks.’ Dr. William Hall is affiliated with the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery.



DR. WILLIAM HALL: THE DEMANDS OF THE PROFESSION

“Part of being a good surgeon is just being that type of person, being meticulous in your decisions. The other part is fear. Even hours after my surgeries, they run through my head. If you lose that respect as a doctor or a surgeon – if you think ‘no big deal, I’ve done this a thousand times’ – that’s when you make mistakes. My philosophy has always been that I perform most everything at my clinic. I have laser technicians and estheticians, but anything invasive or injectable I perform.

Half of what we do as cosmetic surgeons is skill. The other half is picking the right candidates. One of the best things I’ve done to build my practice is the rapport I’ve developed with my patients. I’m honest with them; I don’t embellish. You have to ask patients questions that get at what they want to achieve through surgery, not just what they want to change. Is it that the patient doesn’t like the way she looks in revealing clothing? Is it everyday clothes? Maybe there are professional considerations; maybe he or she is a bodybuilder or an entertainer.

We also try to find out if the patient is seeking surgery for unhealthy reasons. I only do surgery if it’s reasonable and safe to make a change. Surgery also should not become a trend. I advise against surgery with about 20 percent of my consultations. Sometimes, rather than turn someone down flatly, I say that I just don’t have the skills to give the person the results he or she wants.

I feel like I’m privileged to be practicing medicine in the state of Arizona. I think that every time I operate. Maybe it’s my Midwestern upbringing. I just think I’m lucky to be doing this.”

Internet are what changed the business,” says William. “*Extreme Makeover* (2002-2005) was an extremely popular show that my clients always asked me about. It’s no different in the boom we saw in our colleagues going into emergency medicine after *ER* started to air. It really glamorized the field.”

While television was boosting interest for the field of cosmetic surgery, William was embracing new media by using the

Internet to promote his clinic.

“For a young businessman and surgeon, my practice grew very fast,” says William. “In part this was because I developed a Web site right at the start. Even today, we are putting new videos on my site. We have rather graphic before-and-after photos and video there. Some colleagues ask me why I put these pictures and videos online, but I believe clients need to know how these procedures are done before they go in for surgery. In the end, it makes them more comfortable.”

Today, Infini Cosmetic Associates employs nine full-time and two part-time staff. In his career, William has completed 4,500 surgeries. He says his patients have never had any life-threatening complications.

More recently, William has had to adapt to new shifts in the business: changing national health care policy and operating a business specializing in elective procedures in the midst of a recession. “Phoenix was one of the biggest sub-prime markets in the country,” he says. “You can’t go down the street without seeing a foreclosure.”

William notes that his consultations decreased 30 percent in the fall of 2008, while the percentage of clients financing their procedures increased from 50 percent to 75 percent. Still, William remains pleased and optimistic about Infini Cosmetic Associates. “Realistically, we were a hyper-inflated marketplace,” he explains. “I think this level of business is where we stay and I’m genuinely happy with that. Even with the decrease, we are still blessed to have a thriving market. It tells me we’ve done a lot of things right in the past 10 years.”

Though the services that clinics like William’s provide are not covered by health insurance, the national health care reform bill originally included a 5 percent luxury tax on elective cosmetic procedures that the media dubbed “the Botax.” Aesthetic surgeons argued that the bill unfairly targeted the middle class and women; the American Society of Plastic Surgeons stated that 60 percent of cosmetic surgery consultations are to patients who earn between \$30,000 and \$90,000. Thanks in part to lobbying efforts by cosmetic surgeons and their

clients, the tax was removed from the bill. “Our medical suppliers sent out form letters,” says William. “I passed them on to my clients. I’m sure the same thing was happening at clinics in every state.”

Thus progress continues, as William – a man in the business of helping facilitate aesthetic reinvention – continues to successfully navigate through the changing shapes of medicine, media, and business.



LIFE AWAY FROM THE OFFICE

“About four years ago I was in the hospital for eight days with pneumonia,” says William. “It was a real life-threatening illness – I was in intensive care for three days – and it happened because I was overworking myself. If someone wanted surgery, I was at that stage in my career where I’d do it. Right when I came out of the hospital, I realized I needed to slow down and take care of myself.”

Since then, William has taken more time off to travel. Over the years, his travels have taken him to Thailand, Cuba, Romania, Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Brazil, Cayman Islands, St. Thomas, Nicaragua, Panama and Vietnam. Before moving to Scottsdale, he also did a three and a half-month obstetrics residency rotation in the underprivileged country of Colombia. On many of his travels, Hall goes deep sea fishing, most recently off the Pacific Coast of Costa Rica in early February for the start of the billfish season.

“My family loves the outdoors,” says Hall. “That’s the way I grew up. My dad owns a marine business, Algona Marine and Sport. He and my brother, Chad, are both professional walleye fishermen. They fish all over the United States. Chad, at age 21, was the youngest person to ever win a regional tournament. The fishing they do is very skilled and technical. My fishing is a lot more relaxing.”

William’s brother Lance, who attended BV in the late 1990s, works with the family marine business in Algona. His sister Jennifer is a laser technician at Infini Cosmetics.