In Quest for Wrinkle-Free Future, Botox Becomes Thing of the Past

By ALEX KUCZYNSKI

Botox has already worked its numbing magic on the face of America. Hollywood directors like Martin Scorsese and Baz Luhrmann have complained that Botox is so popular among actors that it is playing havoc with facial expression. In a variation on "The Stepford Wives," it is now fashionable in certain social enclaves to see a woman over the age of 35 with the ability to look angry.

And as the wrinkle-smoother rides a wave of popularity with aging boomers, a Botox Nation of citizens with unnaturally placid expressions may find itself abandoning some old beliefs. The wisdom that a person's outer appearance can tell much about his inner self is giving way to the notion that no one should have to look angry to feel good about themselves.

month at the very latest.

Late Edition
New York: Today, cloudy with a 45
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F.D.A. Plans to Approve a Drug Long Endorsed by the Vainer Set

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character can be etched on his face, or Coco Chanel's observation that at 50 you have the face you, not the one your mother expected to see.

But Dr. Debra Jaliman, a plastic surgeon in New York, said that in the hands of an unskilled doctor, Botox — which requires multiple pinprick injections with each treatment — could produce unsightly results.

"Sometimes, one eyebrow is up here and the other is down here," Dr. Jaliman said.

"We had one patient who told us that she had five injections to her neck and she lost the ability to swallow," she said.

"We had a soap opera actress who lost the ability to speak properly. She had to go into hiding for three months."

There is also the potential for what some doctors call the Dorian Gray effect. Because Botox wears off more injections are required to maintain its effects or the patient's face will return to its wrinkly state.

"You can marry a woman with a flawlessly even face," one doctor said, "and wake up with someone who four months later looked like a Shar-Pei."

Despite the aesthetic risks, Mr. Gilbert of Merrill Lynch said that doctors would clamor for the drug, because it was both time-efficient and produced reliable income.

"You buy a vial for $400, and that generates revenue of up to $1,000," he said. "You can do a patient in 10 minutes, and you can run people in all day long. There is probably not another treatment that is so profitable for doctors."

Botox already has competition from Elan Pharmaceuticals, which is also marketing a form of botulinum toxin, and Myobloc, botulinum toxin b. Myobloc has one distinct advantage over Botox: it works within hours, whereas Botox takes full effect in four days. The F.D.A., company executives said, was requesting that those advertisements not feature any models younger than 40.

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"The line between un creased youth and facial emotive power, however, is not always clear. Dr. Gilbert said that Myobloc usually takes several days to take full effect. But several doctors said that Myobloc shots and its effects — at the current dosages — did not last as long as those of Botox.

Dr. Michelle Copeland, a plastic surgeon in New York, said Botox use was already widespread, even among patients that she has to ask them their ages.

"I look at their faces and say, 'Remind me, are you 20? 50? I can't really tell anymore.'"

"Botox's market potential may tap into a public more open to holding onto youth. "Plastic surgery was something restricted to a small group of people who are seen as in their 70s. Now it's in every vogue," Dr. Etcoff of Harvard said. "Because, really, we are all vain now."

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Making worry lines disappear by paralyzing muscles.

Injections of Botox, a drug originally approved for eye muscle spasms, have been used to paralyze facial muscles that cause wrinkles. The treatment is expected to win F.D.A. approval shortly for cosmetic use.