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SPECIAL EVENTS

**PERIORBITAL
REJUVENATION**

Jennifer Walden, M.D.

On Breaking Boundaries for Women in
Medical Aesthetics

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- ❖ The Safer Brazilian Butt Lift

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COVER: Jennifer Walden, M.D. PHOTOGRAPHER: Inti St. Clair



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GIRL POWER EMPIRE

Jennifer Walden, M.D., Paves the Way for Women in Medical Aesthetics as the First Female President of The Aesthetic Society (The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery).

Written by Rebecca Lane

Photography by Inti St. Clair

After spending her formative years watching her mother work as a nurse in charge of day surgery, Jennifer Walden, M.D., discovered her passion for surgery at a young age. Her junior high science teacher predicted she would be a surgeon when she was the first student in class to finish dissecting an animal, cutting into the specimen, identifying the various organs and pinning everything down like seasoned professional.

The Journey Begins

Dr. Walden was certain medicine would be in her future by the time she went to the University of Texas to earn her Bachelor of Arts degree in biology. It was while studying gross anatomy in medical school at the University of Texas Medical Branch, from which she graduated with Highest Honors as the Salutatorian, in Galveston that she solidified her decision to go into surgery. During Dr. Walden's residency, she did an external rotation at the prestigious Plastic Surgery Associates in Miami under the tutelage of Tom Baker, M.D., and James Stuzin, M.D., pioneers of facelift surgery, and realized her true passion lied with aesthetic medicine.

Dr. Walden remembers these early years of aesthetic medicine, when the industry really began to evolve technologically and grow into the booming industry it is today.

"This was actually a few years before Botox and hyaluronic acid fillers were even approved by the FDA for cosmetic use. But towards the end of my residency, we started to use injectibles. New devices came out by the year. When I was coming of age and in my education and formative years, the birth of true aesthetic medicine was occurring."

During her residency, Dr. Walden worked with her career-long mentor, Dr. Linda Phillips, the chair of the division of plastic surgery at UTMB, who supported her choice of aesthetic surgery as a career option.

"She showed me that women could be a mom, have solid relationships and could also be a surgeon," said Dr. Walden. Once that door was opened, Dr. Walden realized a career in aesthetic surgery was the perfect fit for her.

"I felt like being a female in an industry with a 92% female clientele was such a good fit for me. I cared about my appearance. I understood women who cared about their appearance. I didn't think they were vain or psychologically unstable. I just clicked with the specialty. Back then, chairmen would often stigmatize aesthetic surgery or aesthetic medicine, but my chairman did not. Many chairmen back then would not support their residents going off to aesthetic surgery fellowships. It wasn't considered "real surgery" or "real medicine". But I could tell even back then that this was going to grow into a huge industry, that it was going to blow up." It was at that point that Dr. Walden knew her career path would lead to aesthetic surgery.



Dr. Walden uses light pinks, creams and shades of grey to create a sexy, feminine atmosphere.

After completing her residency, Dr. Walden moved to New York for her fellowship at Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital (MEETH), one the first organized cosmetic training program in the country.

"I felt a calling to be in New York City. I loved New York. I'd only been there a couple of times before, but I felt like the city was a part of me. So, I chose the fellowship in New York. I've lived in Texas my whole life and never lived outside Austin or Galveston, and then I moved to New York City. It was such a big culture shock, but it was the most amazing transition in my life."

Moving to New York for her fellowship marked the next crucial phase in Dr. Walden's journey to become the successful aesthetic surgeon she is today. She decided to stay in the city after completing her fellowship and became the associate of world-renowned aesthetic plastic surgeon, Dr. Sherrell J. Aston, for nearly eight years.

"That's where my career really began as an aesthetic plastic surgeon. I learned so much in my fellowship. My chairman was Dr. Sherrell Aston and I ended up going to practice with him for about seven and a half years after my fellowship as his junior associate. That's where I really developed my core skills."

Having honed her skills and technique in aesthetic surgery, in addition to learn how to build and run a five-star cosmetic surgery practice with Dr. Aston, Dr. Walden decided it was time to go solo.

A LITTLE HARDCORE

The Start of a Medical Aesthetics Empire

The birth of her twin boys prompted Dr. Walden to leave New York for her hometown of Austin, Texas, to build her own practice. She knew she wanted her own office operating room so she could control her schedule, as a single mother raising two young boys. "I knew I wanted to position myself in my own practice. I knew I wanted to set it up and run it a certain way."

Dr. Walden's time working for Dr. Aston had prepared her for opening her own successful practice. "He really taught me the foundation of running a business, managing staff, managing patient expectations and, most importantly, the technique and the skill involved in Aesthetic Surgery."

In 2011, Dr. Walden opened her first practice in Westlake Hills, Texas, a suburb of Austin.

Dr. Walden knew that a practice can thrive or die depending on the team hired to help run it. One of the biggest hurdles to building a successful practice is finding the right team, the right mix of people and personalities.

"I would say the hardest part of practice management is finding and keeping the best team for the job. Developing and maintaining those strong relationships with your staff is so important. But it's hard. You can't make people do or say or act a certain way with patients. You want people that share your same core values for work ethic, patient safety, providing a safe environment for patients' privacy, etc. I'm very big on patient privacy. It's difficult just finding hard-working staff. You have to find the right people and if they understand and they jive with your style, those are the people that stick around. I think that's the secret sauce."

"I understood women who cared about their appearance. I didn't think they were vain or psychologically unstable. I just clicked with the specialty."

"When I took the one way flight from JFK to Austin, Texas, with two boys, a cat and several pieces of luggage, I didn't exactly know how it was going to fall together but I knew I wanted to do it my way. That's just my personality - I'm fiercely independent."

Dr. Walden had homefield advantage when she started building her practice. Having grown up in Austin, she knew the city like the back of her hand, its various neighborhoods, schools, social clubs and other segments to target for building her patient base.

"In Austin, it was relatively easy because at the time that I moved here, there were not very many female plastic surgeons who were practicing aesthetic surgery. I just started to market to places and people and groups that I knew would be interested in aesthetic medicine and surgery. And then I think media begets media. The media started featuring me in local magazines and that sort of thing. All of a sudden, one day, you wake up and you have a brand, and people want to learn about it and understand it."

A team of employees is much like a family, as Dr. Walden well knows. Her own team has gone through many changes over the years, but has grown and become better because of it.

"The women on my team are all really tough and have a good sense of humor. I support them and I listen to them. They can come to me and I can help them if they are open and honest. I like that sense of family and I think that makes for longevity in practice."

Of course, no team is complete without an inspiring leader.

"The way I function is predicated on the servant leader. It's an example-based leadership. I have overheard my staff say, "nobody works harder than Dr. Walden." I think some people come to work and they think the boss sits around and just counts the dollar bills." "Well, that's not me," states Dr. Walden, "I think the foundation for a thriving business is leading by example."



It's just the ladies at Dr. Walden's practice, with her all-female team and comforting environment designed to sooth nerves.



Creating a Welcoming Space

Dr. Walden has tailored the design of her surgical practice and medical spas to feel like welcoming spaces for women, taking care with the color scheme, design and general atmosphere in each location.

"I have the same interior designer who's helped with the design of each building. If you walked into any of my Med Spas, whether it's Austin or New York City, they have a similar branding. It's feminine, but like sharp and edgy and sexy. I use a lot of light pinks, grey and then some brighter tones."

She has taken great care to make her patients feel as comfortable and safe during what can be a very vulnerable experience.

"We obviously want our patients not to be anxious. We want it to be an experience where they're getting away from the hassle of daily life. From feedback I've gotten from patients, they come to us because it's an all-female team. Whether it's in the office, clinic, operating room or med spa, it reflects that vibe." Dr. Walden adds, "I just want people to feel comfortable and not feel that they're in a steely masculine environment. It's just us ladies."

The Growth of an Empire and Brand

Dr. Walden's single surgical practice soon grew into a medical spa empire, and with it, so did her professional reputation as a female pioneer in the medical aesthetics industry.

"I ended up creating a surgical practice that had adjacent and remote medical spas. In 2016, I decided to develop a med spa with some key team members near my current surgical center in Westlake. I then opened another satellite location in north Austin. Each of these med spas are able to function individually and carry their own load."

A few years later, Dr. Walden decided to expand her med spa empire to New York.

"Around 2018, I decided to expand to New York. I still loved the city and I still felt part of my heart was there, so I developed a medical spa in midtown New York on world-renowned 57th Street."

Dr. Walden's involvement in industry organizations has led to her becoming the first female president of The Aesthetic Society (The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery) this year, a groundbreaking accomplishment for women in the field of aesthetic medicine everywhere, and one that was foreshadowed back in her residency. She recalls the first conference she attended for the organization in 2004.

A LITTLE CORE



Dr. Walden's main focus now is facial aesthetic surgery.

"I remember going to my first Aesthetic Society annual symposium, then known as The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery. It was a whole new world and the first time I was educated by industry leaders in such an impressive format in a huge exhibit hall filled with skin care companies, publishers and other industry professionals. I knew then I wanted to practice aesthetic surgery and be part of the organization long-term. I had a revelation looking through their journal. I remember looking at the masthead and seeing all men. It made me wonder about the evolution of female leadership in a field with mainly female clientele. It was at this point in my career I pondered my own legacy and what a career in this field could lead to...potentially even leading this huge organization!"

Work/Life Balance

A single mother with two young boys, Dr. Walden takes balancing her work and home life very seriously, especially as her business has grown and she's met her career goals.

"I've become more focused on facial aesthetic surgery, so I can spend more time with my twin boys and

run my businesses. My goal would be to just grow those medical spas!" One of Dr. Walden's mentors, medspa pioneer Dr. Grant Stevens taught her that it's a good day when your medical spas eclipse and bring in more than your surgery center. "That eclipse has happened," she says, "and I like that because I get to spend time with my children. My kids are eleven years old, so it's great to be able to come home when they get home from school. At the end of the day I want to wind up with an admirable work-life balance. So, my goal after the presidency this year is going to be more about going back to that balance and spending time with my children as they progress through school, before they go off to college."

Looking Ahead

Dr. Walden is not throwing in the towel anytime soon, however, and recently opened another fully built-out medical spa in Tribeca in New York City.

"A lot of people ask me, what next? I'm where I've wanted to be for a long time, so my future goals are to, after this year, focus on spending time with my boys and curating my facial aesthetic surgery practice. We also just opened a med spa in Tribeca in early September."

"I pondered my own legacy and what a career in this field could lead to...potentially even leading this huge organization."

What is it that you enjoy most about your career?

"It's amazing as a plastic surgeon to, within hours, be able to positively transform someone's life with a surgical procedure. I go in and out of treatment rooms all day, so to me, naturally it's 'just another day'," says Dr. Walden. She adds, "But I have to pause and remind myself when I talk to them post-operatively and really get to know the patient and their family how much of a difference I made in their life, and what a privilege it is. No matter how big or small the surgery, to the patients, what we do is life-changing...and that's what it's all about." ME

Rebecca Lane is the managing editor of *MedEsthetics*.