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## EXCLUSIVE REPORTS

From the February 22, 2002 print edition

### Botox bonanza

#### Lining up for a shot today to keep the wrinkles away

Rick Desloge

Botox was almost unknown here until four years ago. Now the drug, which temporarily removes wrinkles, is a staple at nearly every plastic surgeon's office in the region.

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"There's no question the drug is gaining popularity," said Dr. James Lowe, a plastic surgeon on the faculty of Washington University School of Medicine. He said some plastic

surgeons in his group see three patients a week who are requesting the injections.

Botox, a derivative of botulinum toxin, is the brand name given to the drug that is derived from the bacterium that causes botulism or food poisoning. It is administered in a series of injections that partially paralyze the muscles responsible for wrinkles.

The number of Botox treatments nationally has jumped 2,356 percent over five years, with more than 1.6 million procedures performed last year.



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Those numbers are expected to soar even higher going forward. An OK from the Food and Drug Administration to use the drug for wrinkle removal is pending, and that decision is expected to unleash millions of dollars in advertising spending and push the drug into the mainstream.

Dr. James Scheu of Plastic Surgery Consultants said his group's six plastic surgeons already see 100 people a month requesting the treatment.

Requests for Botox have grown by 30 percent in the last two months at The Facial Plastic Surgery Center, part of SLUCare. Dr. Greg Branham, an associate professor and director of facial plastic surgery at Saint Louis University School of Medicine, said those gains were preceded by a tenfold increase in Botox patients in 2001 over 2000.

"It's not the fountain of youth, but it is effective in certain areas -- around the eyes and the forehead," Branham said.

The injections also can be very profitable. Area doctors said they pay about \$400 for each vial of Botox, which generates about \$1,000 in patient revenue. Injections around the forehead, eyes and other areas of the face run from \$300 to \$600 a treatment. Patients typically require two to four treatments a year to maintain the effect. The treatments are not covered by insurance.

About 80 percent of the patients seeking the treatments are women, who range in age from 30 to 70, doctors said. Some area doctors, such as Branham, 45, also are using the drug to remove their own wrinkles.

Dr. Roberta Sengelmann, a dermatologic surgeon and director of the Center for Dermatologic and Cosmetic Surgery at Washington University, may have the longest history with Botox here. She started using it on patients in 1997, usually about one a month. Since then, she's given thousands of injections to hundreds of patients. "I use it at least every other day, if not every day now," she said.

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