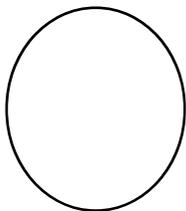


DR. ZEIN OBAGI

GLOBAL PIONEER IN DERMATOLOGY

Dr. Zein Obagi's career is a wonderful Arab success story; the story of an Arab American who conquered the field of dermatology on an international level. Born and raised in the ancient city of Aleppo, Syria, Obagi graduated from the University of Damascus with a degree in medicine, and then went to the United States during his early twenties to pursue his dreams. With hard work and a passion for his profession, he developed one of the world's most renowned Skin Health Institutes and became a leader in the international medical field. He has also created a state of the art line of skincare products that are sought out by his dedicated clients around the world. In the process Dr. Obagi has become one of the best and well known dermatologists in the United States and the world.



ne of Dr.Obagi's passions is passing on his vast experience to others, by conducting summits and lectures to further educate dermatologists in the US and beyond. He has also become the most

favored dermatologist to many public figures and top Hollywood celebrities, who visit him regularly at his iconic Beverly Hills clinic in Los Angeles, California. Yet Dr. Obagi takes his success in his stride and constantly seeks to further his knowledge and perfect his skin products to maintain his position as a cutting edge professional in the science of skin health care. Our Editor in Chief, Yasmine Shihata, sat down with this extraordinary pioneer to discover the secrets of his success...

As a Syrian young man growing up in the Middle East, how did you decide to get into dermatology?

I grew up in Syria, in the ancient city of Aleppo and I studied medicine at the University of Damascus, where I graduated in 1972. I

“By becoming a dermatologist, I discovered all about the limitations in the field”

travelled to the United States right after my graduation to further pursue my studies and to become a dermatology specialist in the United States. I enjoyed studying pathology (the study of the causes and effects of a disease), which was mandatory for first-year medical students. After that, I went on to study gynecology for a year and later joined the United States' navy for 6 years to expand my training and knowledge of dermatology.

I've always appreciated the beauty of the skin; I went through a traumatic experience that turned skin care into a passion for me. This was after my sister had third degree burns caused by boiled water that was spilt on her back, leaving her with severe scars. With that

experience, I saw the limitations of dermatology at the time, especially in curing such cases. There wasn't an effective solution and that's when I decided to focus more on skin treatments. I was about 16 or 17 years old at the time, and I promised myself that I would dedicate my efforts to find solutions and cures to such cases and find ways to prevent them. By becoming a dermatologist, I discovered all about the limitations in the field. During the early 1980's for instance, there weren't any treatments for dark or Asian skin. Treatments back then were limited, so I started investigations and created the first products to cure cases for all types of skin regardless to its color or texture. I then went on to publish a book about skin health care science a few years later and created a product that protects and keeps skin healthy. I also eliminated any discrimination for skin types as I was the first to create treatment protocols to all types of skin. It was quite successful when it came to treating pigmentation problems, and addressing certain medical conditions that were hard to treat, such as chronic acne scars, and damaged skin. I then started to gather dermatolo-



Obagi Training Session

gists from all over the world, including Middle-eastern countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and others, to attend my courses and lectures.

When did you start giving lectures?

During the late 1980's, I had the most successful theories presented each year through my Obagi-symposium courses.

I did more than twenty of those across the United States every year and had doctors coming from all over the world to listen to the new science provided by the courses. At the time, I also started to create my own line of products, the "Obagi-NU Derm" line, which quickly gained worldwide popularity.

I've graduated at least 60 faculty members, dermatologists in the US and worldwide. We have a society that meets every year to discuss the future of skin care and to search for ways to achieve healthy and clear skin for people throughout their lives.

What made the NU-Derm line unique?

It was the first, advanced line at that time. Later when the company's investors went public, I decided to leave the company as it became more interested in profit rather than focusing on education and producing new products. I left them and went on to create my new ZO line, which expanded on the skin health science that I created in the late 80's. We started adding important elements with regards to skin sensitivity, DNA, and



Dr. Zein Obagi during a lecture

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inflammation. For the first time, unlike the old Obagi Company, ZO skin health was created for women and teenage girls who want to apply basic, scientific skin care programs that fit their skin needs. We provided a scientific approach that helps people keep their skin healthy, young and vibrant for as long as possible.

We've also incorporated the concept of prevention, meaning we can prevent aging skin, skin spots, scars and many other cases. As a result, ZO has now become more attractive for users around the world. The old Obagi skin care line is done; the company still uses my name but I have nothing to do with it anymore, they are still selling this 25 year old product! That's why I urge all my clients

to only purchase the new ZO line, which is much more advanced and fully endorsed by me.

We also provide unique approaches to inject Botox and fillers, and we take on a much more artistic approach to maintain skin beauty and health. Rather than just applying the same approaches on

different types of skin, we tend to individualize care for each case based on its specific needs.

Do you consider yourself an entrepreneur or a teacher who spreads knowledge and the technology of modern skin care? Because you seem to have parallel paths in both careers...

I'd like to leave a legacy behind. Financial profit is not really what I'm after because if you provide people with good treatments and results, you'll make more money than everybody else. I feel confident to place my name on skin health care products and to be recognized as the modern evolutionist of the science of skin health care. It took me time, guts and a deep belief in the science I was providing to be able to reach the position I'm in now. If you don't have the guts to take risks and have a solid scientific background, you'll be out of the field in no time. But yes, I love to work, I love to teach and I want to leave a valuable scientific basis for future generations to build upon. I have three children who are willingly joining the medical field as well. ►

Do you see this as a family business?

It's not a family business. It's more likely that my children are following my footsteps. They might succeed but they still might fail. It all depends on the passion they've got for skin. I am in love with skin. I feel passionate when I treat damaged skin and severe cases; it's one of my greatest rewards. If they have the same passion, there is no doubt they will achieve success as well.

Would you go as far as conducting cosmetic surgery?

I define who should get what treatment. You cannot apply the same treatment approaches on everybody, because each skin type needs a unique approach. So it's my job to create safety parameters, procedure and treatment protocols.

Tell us a bit about your journey from Syria and your immigration to the U.S. How easy was it for you as a Syrian to pursue your own studies in the States?

I grew up in Syria and moved to the United States in 1972. I had a full immigration and became a US citizen. My parents died when I was young. I still have a passion for the Middle East and my country, but back then I felt that I had to pursue science and the opportunity to fulfill the passion I had for it.

It wasn't easy when I first began my studies in the US, as I had to prove myself amongst my fellow students. I had to prove my passion and dedication for science if I wanted to enroll in a highly ranked educational institution. The competition was challenging and being an immigrant from Syria wasn't easy. But I had a goal to become a pathologist before becoming a dermatologist, and that's what put me ahead of everyone else in the university. Also to prove that I'm a true American, I joined the navy for a few years to enhance my position in the American community. I was one of nine carefully selected dermatologists to join the navy, chosen out of a hundred others based on our scientific knowledge, background and dedication.

Did you face any discrimination or challenges during your first years of practice?

You will see jealousy, but not to the degree that you will have a war against you. Luckily I started in a town south of San Diego, where 80% of the residents are Mexican. I was the first person to tackle pigmentation issues like dermal melisma and cases that were considered so difficult to treat at the time. I was

successful at that so people started to come from all over the world. And slowly I moved from this small town to a more prestigious town called La Jolla then eventually moved to Beverly Hills. There was definitely jealousy everywhere, with people asking who I was and questioning my position because I didn't

fortunately many people fall in the trap. I urge people to go to a doctor who's certified and who has a solid background. Women have to do their research when choosing the right dermatologist for their cases. I am an icon; people who come to me are guaranteed to have the best treatment and results. Having the wrong treatments could be disastrous; I deal with such cases on a daily basis, and it costs the patient much more money to fix a problem of falsely injected Botox or fillers for example, than it really costs to apply them in the first place.

Tell us about your expansion from a U.S. success story to an international one...

I never made an actual decision to become international, but as the medical field is a connected field, and dermatology is the same everywhere in world, doctors from different societies all over the world are invited to attend meetings and summits to discuss the latest updates on medical achievements and discoveries. That's why my teachings and practices became international. Now there are more than 100 countries all over the world that follow the skin health care science I have created, which represents the future of the field. So if they haven't joined now, they'll have to join later. I invented the mathematics of skin, so it is mandatory to learn this if you want to have a higher stake and a more effective impact in the future of skin health care science.

Where is the research done, is it all done here?

I train doctors In my office here. I train doctors also in many cities when I am invited by different medical schools. For example, I train doctors in the Cleveland Clinic and in Mayo Clinic. I conduct lectures everywhere like In Boston and many other places across the country.

Since you are already connected this way, what made you decide to start having Obagi clinics?

There are Obagi clinics everywhere, however they are clinics owned and operated by local people. All I do is lecture and train the doctors. However, I know nothing about the way they operate and practice the science after I leave. Most of the centers that open under the Obagi name give people the impression that it's me who runs it, when I have absolutely nothing to do with it, and most of those centers still use the 25-year old Obagi product which should be replaced with the new ZO line. We found much corruption in the process that operated the old Obagi Com-



“You will see jealousy, but not to the degree that you will have a war against you”

go to Harvard or any of the finest institutions. My answer was always that my results speak for themselves and I challenged anybody in the world to question my health skin care approaches. And now after 25 years of experience, even my worst enemies are now my friends.

Being a real professional does it bother you that there are many unqualified people doing cosmetic procedures?

It bothers me and all ethical physicians in the US and around the world to find this phenomenon happening so frequently. Unfor-

pany, that's why I left them. And a lot of the clinics in the Middle East were not operating correctly as well...

In November, I plan to visit the Middle East and start cleaning the mess that was created and have a fresh start. We need to introduce the new ZO products in the market, and train doctors on how to apply them for treatments. The problem with the Middle East is that most of the clinics are only profit oriented and not much interested in providing the best treatments. I don't understand this because when you focus on good quality treatment, you build a good reputation, which satisfies your financial goals.

Are there any Middle Eastern clinics that are 100% approved by you?

Absolutely not. The first clinic I inaugurated was in Abu Dhabi with a local partner. I invested in 25% of the project, but problems started to take place the moment I withdrew myself. I am totally against companies who sell the old Obagi medical products with no medical supervision, because this can cause severe harm for patients. This is not how ethical treatment should be administered.. Every skin has to be treated individually; you can't apply the same products on different types of skin, as it will never be as useful as a specifically prescribed treatment. If you have oily skin and use moisturizer, you're going to ruin the skin. On the other hand, if you have dry skin and you apply moisturizer, you're going to create an addiction and make your skin drier. Stimulation, hydration and renewing are the three major steps to amplify skin cell renewal. Most skin health care products available in the market today are only moisturizing products.

Hydration of the skin is designed by God: the water you drink is absorbed by your bodily organs (including the skin.) Just like a tree, water is absorbed and travels through its roots. If you cut the roots, the tree will die. You cannot substitute the hydration process by using things from the outside world to fix the problem; this would be against Mother Nature. Look at a baby's skin for instance, it looks pure and clean simply because all the cells within the body

are functioning perfectly. Women, on the other hand, don't usually seek to solve the problem from within, as they attempt to cover the problems on the outside by applying moisturizing products. The huge advertising beauty campaigns using Hollywood celebrities and models to promote such

come a smarter consumer.

How can you self diagnose your own skin?

If you know the definition of healthy skin it's very simple, it's like the dermatologists' national anthem, "Skin has to be smooth, even colored, firm and tight, strong, not dry, and free of disease."

This is the raw concept of skin analysis. Doctors who are trained in skin health are known to recognize skin type and work on basic skin needs programs. For example, at age 20 you might need to use products to prevent textural damage and at age 30 you need to prevent aging. This is how we can keep people looking young. I guarantee you that one day there will be no department stores selling skin care products. This is one of the missions of my life. I'm going to force all the cosmetic companies, regardless of which company or brand, to make products that can increase cellular activity, rejuvenation vitality, and cellular function. Otherwise they will go out of business.

Tell us about celebrities you've worked with.

I've treated many Hollywood celebrities and public figures. I can only share with you a few names that include Ricky Martin, some of the Jackson family, Sandra Bullock, Clint Eastwood and many others. Celebrities have insecurities, just like everyone else, and they are always concerned about their public appearance. Now we are creating more public awareness about natural beauty and the importance of taking care of your skin using natural approaches, as we urge patients not to do plastic surgery.

What is your ultimate goal for the future?

I want everyone to have healthy and beautiful skin.

What are five things we should all do to maintain healthy skin?

Clean your face properly. Keep your skin active by using something that maintains, repairs, and strengthens your skin so that your skin does not become sensitive or dry. Drink a lot of water and avoid sugar because it is a very potent inflammatory agent. Eat a lot of green food, vegetables and most importantly avoid the sun. If you are in the sun, use sunscreen and don't be obsessed with getting tanned! ■



Zein Obagi and wife Samar

“Celebrities have insecurities, just like everyone else, and they are always concerned about their public appearance”

products, make it hard for average patient to know what is really best to treat their case. It's the same natural process with skin; you can't just apply outside moisturizing products to solve a dehydration problem because it won't be solved. You're going to have to drink water to fix the problem from within. So to me, the system of a product should be based on the skin type and needs. Every skin needs repair, stimulation, then hydration. If you skip the first two processes and head straight to the hydration problem, then you are ignoring the basic notion of skin health care. Everyone can go online, read, and be-