

TISSUE CLAY

New Material makes plastic surgeons feel "more like sculptors than doctors"

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- by Larry Doyle



Courtney before and after refinement of nose and augmentation of lips

New York: Plastic Surgeons are frustrated artists, aspiring to Pygmalion perfection but doomed by biology to achieve considerably less. Living bone simply cannot be carved like ivory, and the flesh cannot be molded as clay.

Dr. Michael Sachs, Director of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at the New York Medical College, has invented a substance that may change that.

Applied to bone, it acts like a bone; added to flesh, it becomes flesh. It appears to be safe and permanent, and very satisfying artistically.

With some experimentation, Sachs found he could mix Avitene (a fibrous, safe, FDA-approved protein that is often used in operating rooms to absorb blood) with the patient's own blood to make a putty like substance. This clay like material could be injected into the nose and molded into place, solidifying within a week to palpably resemble real bone.

Prior to the advent of tissue clay, surgeons would try to correct these deformities with bone or cartilage grafts, requiring secondary surgery to harvest the graft tissue as well as producing less than satisfying results.

"Plastic surgeons are really artists at heart, but we've been frustrated," Sachs says. "Up until now we've had to carve and drill and try to mold, with results that are always something less than perfect."

Sachs has done more than 1,000 such nose augmentations, with a success rate of nearly 95 per cent after four years of followup. There have been no complications so far. His success was reported recently in the journal of Head and Neck Surgery, a publication of the American Medical Association.

"There are a least 30 surgeons around the country now using the

tissue clay," Sachs says, and the procedure is getting high marks in professional circles. Sachs has also found lately that the tissue clay, when injected into a damaged cheek, will not harden entirely, retaining its fleshy nature. Mixing bits of tissue or bone with the clay beforehand seems to increase its ability to mimic its surroundings.

"Tissue clay also has been useful in rebuilding chins and cheek bones, as well as eyelid surgery," Sachs says. In all, he estimates the putty could potentially be used on a million people in the United States. "Up until now we've never had a substance that's natural and malleable, and now it seems we have one," he says. "This is what we've been waiting for. It really is wonderful stuff."



Lisa is a 25 year old woman whose face became more beautiful after cheekbone enhancement