

LIFE & STYLE

A NEW LEASE OF LIFE

SHELLEY MARSDEN speaks to Hina Solanki, who explains how medical camouflage can change people's lives...



I meet the lovely Hina Solanki of Solcosmedics in her offices, in North West London. Hina works in the field of 'medical camouflage' – using the latest technology to minimise scars and skin problems, in doing so giving many people a *joie de vivre* that they have not felt for years. Sol Cosmedics are specialists in the field of Micropigmentation, otherwise known as Semi-permanent Cosmetics, Semi-permanent Make-up and Permanent Make-up. Hina has a impressive reputation in the field, and her level of expertise allows her to create results which can be subtle or dramatic, depending on what you wish, creating a look that is at the same natural and beautiful.

WHAT IS IT EXACTLY?

Micro-pigmentation/permanent cosmetics are an advanced form of cosmetic tattooing. Regular tattoos go very deep into the skin, while the kind of precision art Hina does just pierces the upper dermal layer, so it's not as permanent.

It must be called 'permanent make-up', however, as tiny little molecules are left in the skin. They are there forever, but are not visible to the human eye and fade over a period of years. A micro-pigmentation treatment will normally need to be done again after three to five years – not a full treatment, just a 'colour boost'.

Over the past ten years, permanent cosmetics have improved continually with the introduction of computerised digital machines, disposable cartridges, state-of-the-art pigments and, most importantly, the quality of treatments available and the ability of practitioners to pass their knowledge on to students.

Clients no longer have to be satisfied with heavily blocked brows, thick eyeliners and unsightly lip lines, as the techniques, colour knowledge and pigments have advanced massively in permanent cosmetics.

SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE

Hina Solanki got into this specialist field of work some years ago, after she fell ill and had to have permanent cosmetics herself, which is one of the reasons she is so obviously passionate about what she does – this is much more than a simple 'job' for her.

"I was diagnosed about six years ago with an autoimmune disorder, and unfortunately I lost a lot of my eyebrows", she recalls. "They went completely white and it



Permanent Medical Cosmetics

FAQ'S

Q: HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

A: Although your procedures can last for many years, this is dependant on age, skin type, colour selection and lifestyle. With soft, more neutral enhancements, to keep the look fresh it is recommended that you have a 'colour boost' maintenance every couple of years.

Q: DOES IT HURT?

A: We use the latest digital technology to minimise skin trauma, as well as the most effective numbing agents to minimise any discomfort.

Q: WHAT WILL I LOOK LIKE AFTER THE TREATMENT?

A: The pigment colour will appear darker and more intense; this can last for several days. Complete healing can take up to six weeks for the pigment to mature in the skin, and the true colour to emerge.

Do you have a question on permanent cosmetics that you'd like Hina to personally answer and is not listed below? Simply email: hina@solcosmedics.co.uk with your question and wait for a personal reply.



looked like I had none; there was no definition around my eyes. It was horrible."

She is much better now and, after having had permanent cosmetic work done, says she felt incredible, like she was 'human' again. It was at this point that she thought how amazing it would be to make people feel that good on a daily basis, and began to study towards doing this herself, giving up a successful personal finance business in the process.

"Now, I go into work and I can have people hugging me, dancing around the room, saying I've changed their lives! That makes you feel on top of the world, it's a great feeling. Because I've been ill myself, I understand what people are feeling, and perhaps that's why they tend to feel comfortable with me straight away. That's important – even simple cosmetic enhancements are nerve-racking, so the trust must be there."

DIFFICULT CASES

Sometimes, Hina will deal with self-harm victims who perhaps have ugly scars they want to hide on their wrists and arms. She remembers one month recently, when she had about three patients who had self-harmed, one after the other. Staying strong emotionally, she admits, was tough.

She says, "The parents would be in here crying, the person themselves would be in tears. I can feel myself praying inside to keep it together, because I've got to be reassuring and calm, which I am – but I'm still a human being. And sometimes, there are situations which touch me deeply."

SPREADING THE WORD

Hina is dedicated to spreading the word about medical camouflage, as she feels there are so many people with burns, accident scars, even cosmetic surgery scars, that simply don't realise it exists, despite extensive media coverage on the treatment.

"I do a lot of voluntary work just to get the word out; not about coming to get treatment specifically from me, as there are a good few people around – I just want people to know they don't have to suffer. They don't have to put up with something they don't want they have."

Its slow rise in popularity is probably down to the fact that, some ten to fifteen years ago, medical camouflage had a pretty bad name. Unlike Hina, there

were many untrained, unlicensed people practising and using potential harmful pigments. Thankfully, things have changed since then. Nowadays, trained micro-pigmentation practitioners use 100% mineral pigments, which are edible, completely non-toxic and EU-regulated.

IS IT EXPENSIVE?

The all-important question – how much is this treatment likely to cost? The answer is, not extortionate amounts, but it's not the cheapest procedure out there either.

Hina charges £250 per session for medical camouflage, but most people will need more than one 'session' as she needs to look at how the skin has settled and the colour developed after the first 'tattoo'.

A typical cosmetic enhancement session involving the definition of eyebrows, for instance, is more likely to be a one-off and will cost in the region of £450, while eyes will cost around £350, and lips from £450.

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BEFORE



AFTER



HOW CAN IT BENEFIT ME?

Hina's work is wide-reaching, and involves permanent enhancements, such as drawing on eyebrows, eyelashes and recreating lip shape to make a person look, for instance, more youthful or less tired. What she is particularly proud of, however, is her work in the field of medical camouflage, which she takes every opportunity to promote and bring awareness to.

'CREATING' AREOLA

"If someone has had breast cancer, for instance, they may have an implant, but they may have lost their whole areola, the nipple area, so I basically re-draw it back on", she says. "To the eye it looks three-dimensional, and it's only if you touch it you would realise it's actually flat. For somebody that's gone through so much, it's a pity this treatment isn't available on the NHS, which I think is pretty lousy - they just need that last little boost."

CORRECTING VITILIGO

Vitiligo (loss of pigmentation in the skin) is another condition Hina sees a lot of, particularly with dark-skinned people as it is more obvious than on paler skins. She uses different techniques to build up skin tone, and completely camouflage the affected area. People, she says, often wear make-up to hide the problem, but if you go swimming or you're spending a lot of time in hot weather, it rubs or melts off, so this her treatment, she says, gives people the confidence that temporary make-up can't.

HIDING ALOPECIA

Alopecia (hair loss from some or all areas of the body, usually the scalp) is something Hina and practitioners like her can do great things to minimise the effect of. She tends to see more men with this problem, something she puts down to women's resilient nature!

Says Hina, "A lot of men come to me suffering from alopecia, especially in the scalp. Women seem to cope a little better with these things than men; we're a little stronger! In my experience, if a man has a patch in his scalp, it's devastating. It affects his confidence, his work, his relationships; he completely shrivels up."

What she does in these cases is 'mimic' hair follicles in the scalp through micro-pigmentation. The process can't make anyone look like they've got hair where there's none, but what it can do is make it less obvious to the eye.

She continues, "We get a lot of men who have had hair transplants, which unfortunately often leave a scar on the scalp. Again, I'll help hide that as much as I can. They've gone through their own traumas, now they feel great and the hair's grown back, but they're left with a tell-tale sign. So helping with that does so much for them. But the ratio of men to women that come to me is still about 20/80."

MINIMISING SCARS

Explaining how she goes about hiding unsightly scars, Hina says it's all based on the same process - basically camouflaging the area by tattooing over it.

"We work carefully with that particular person's skin and skin tone. If you look at your own hand

now, you'll see it's not just one tone; you've probably got four or five subtle colours in there, so I use that same blend of colours and build up the skin surface.

"It's about creating illusions with colour. Women already do it when they wear make-up; you can wear eye-shadow, shade it in a certain way to make your eyes look bigger, or brighter – that's what it's all about, except what we do on the skin is permanent.

"Medical camouflage works like a soldier hiding in the jungle – you won't spot him immediately, but if you start looking hard, you will see him."