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## Aging has a new enemy

**Dysport aims to take market share from dominant wrinkle-reducer Botox**

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Dr. Joseph L. Grzeskiewicz administered Dysport to patient Kathy Norton of San Marcos at the La Jolla Cosmetic Surgery Centre. The new competitor to Botox recently hit local doctors' offices. (John R. McCutchen / Union-Tribune) -

There is a new wrinkle in the wrinkle wars.

For more than a decade, Botox has changed the faces of a nation by erasing pesky frown lines on women, and men, too, who were desperate to turn back time. That's been especially true here in looks-conscious Southern California.

Just one little problem: A syringe full of the fountain of youth hasn't come cheaply.

That may be changing as the economy has eroded Botox's sales and the iconic wrinkle treatment finally is facing its first real competition.

The new challenger, Dysport, recently hit local doctors' offices and uses the same botulinum toxin as Botox, paralyzing the muscle to smooth away wrinkles.

But while the differences between the two treatments are minimal — some liken it to the difference between Coke and Pepsi — doctors say Dysport's entry into the United States could mean a price war could break out in the lucrative anti-wrinkle business long dominated by Botox.

“I'm just glad to have something else to offer people,” said Dr. Joseph L. Grzeskiewicz, a board-certified plastic surgeon with La Jolla Cosmetic Surgery Centre.

Even doctors who are satisfied with Botox and don't plan to use Dysport are glad it's here.

“I'm not interested in it (Dysport) at all,” said Dr. Peter Fodor, a Beverly Hills plastic surgeon. “But I welcome that there is another company, because otherwise it's a complete monopoly.”

That monopoly has meant Allergan, the maker of Botox, has been able to charge higher prices even as its popularity and sales have grown, said Dr. Michelle Pelle, a San Diego dermatologist. Typically, higher sales volume drives down prices because it costs less to produce in bulk.

“There has been no competition. We've had to suffer price increases from Allergan year after year,” Pelle said.

Allergan said it currently charges \$525 for a 100-unit vial while in 2005 the same vial cost around \$466. The company says fluctuations in prices consumers pay depend on what doctors charge for their services as well as how much Botox a patient needs. Allergan typically recommends using 20 units to treat the glabellar lines, also known as the frown lines between the eyebrows.

While doctors seem to be hankering for an alternative, taking on Botox, a brand with unquestionable muscle, won't be easy.

“It's like a Kleenex,” said Dr. Robert Singer, a plastic surgeon in La Jolla. “Botox is almost like a generic name.”

Despite being an unknown quantity in the United States, Dysport is hardly new — it has been available for therapeutic use since 1991 and is approved for aesthetic use in 34 countries.

Kellie Reagan, a company spokeswoman, said Botox has long competed against Dysport in other countries and has maintained more than an 80 percent share of the global neurotoxin market. Botox's global sales are split 50-50 between cosmetic use and therapeutic use to treat such conditions as muscle spasms in the neck.

“In the majority of those markets where physicians have had a choice between Botox and Dysport, Botox has become the most widely used treatment,” she said.

The early buzz on Dysport was that it acts quicker, lasts longer and is less expensive. But doctors who have used Dysport aren't so sure there is any real fundamental difference between it and Botox.

Grzeskiewicz said Dysport might work slightly faster than Botox, but he said studies about Dysport's longevity have been contradictory and the cost difference is negligible.

He said his practice typically charges about \$14 a unit for Botox and \$5.49 for Dysport. For frown lines between the brows, Grzeskiewicz said he typically uses about 15 units of Botox and 37 to 45 units of Dysport.

So far, Dysport patients like what they see.

Jessica Burgio, 28, recently had Dysport injections between her brow and on her forehead. She said the results were instant, smoothing her forehead lines. The Pacific Beach resident said she chose Dysport because she heard it is supposed to last as long as six months compared with four months for Botox. She figures if she only has to do it twice a year, she can swing spending \$325 for the injections.

“At that point, it's reasonable,” Burgio said.

Medicis, which is marketing Dysport in the United States, is careful not to make any claims about whether it lasts longer or acts quicker than Botox. But its print ad, which first appeared in *Us Weekly*, coyly says “Everybody's talking about Dysport. The timing's just right.”

The problem is the timing might not be right at all, as even Botox has seen its global sales drop because of the weak economy. In the second quarter of 2009, Allergan's global sales of Botox were \$336 million, a decrease of 3.2 percent from a year ago. In the previous quarter, sales of Botox had slipped almost 6 percent.

The drop in Botox sales surprised many plastic surgeons, Singer said. While his colleagues predicted the current slump in the cosmetic surgeries, the conventional wisdom was that Botox would be untouched because of its lower cost.

Still, Singer said, as people's concerns about the economy have settled down, he has noticed an uptick in his Botox business.

Jane Weston, a plastic surgeon in Atherton, an affluent community in Northern California, said Dysport's real problem is not the economy but its botched launch. She said she had to request samples repeatedly from Medicis and her patients seem unaware of the new Botox alternative.

“I expected that there would be enormous demand,” she said, adding, “I've found it very curious that there has not been more buzz.”

There have been a few setbacks in Dysport's rollout. Initially, Medicis wanted to market the wrinkle treatment as Reloxin, but the U.S. Food and Drug Administration said it had to continue to be called Dysport because that's what it is known as in other countries.

Also, the FDA recently ruled that both Botox and Dysport had to carry a black box warning notifying patients of the possible health risks associated with injecting botulinum toxins, including difficulty with swallowing and breathing. A black box warning is the FDA's strongest safety alert. Doctors who use Botox and Dysport said the health concerns don't apply to cosmetic procedures because so little of the botulinum toxin is injected.

Janice Lipsky, vice president of aesthetics for Medicis, said Dysport's rollout has gone according to plan. The company has spent much of the summer educating doctors on Dysport and how best to use it.

“You don't want to drive patients in without doctors being properly trained,” she said.

The real push with consumers will start soon as the company has bought a number of ads in the November issues of beauty and fashion magazines. Medicis is also offering consumers a \$75 rebate at select doctors offices to entice them to try the new treatment.

San Diego and the rest of California might be ripe for Dysport, as the West is traditionally one of Botox's strongest markets. According to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, the Mountain-Pacific region, which includes California, had the highest number of Botox injections in the country with more than 1.5 million procedures in 2008.

Still, even if consumers start clamoring for Dysport, it might take some time to make inroads in the wrinkle market.

For her part, Pelle said she is taking a wait-and-see approach.

“I'm not going to be a pioneer with my patients,” she said.

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