

Assessing Laser and IPL Providers

The problem of unwanted hair growth is shared by innumerable women diagnosed with PCOS and for those lucky enough to have suitable hair and skin the technology of light based treatments, laser and intense pulsed light (IPL) is well established as the fastest and easiest solution to the problem. Not too long ago only specialist clinics offered these treatments however every other beauty salon now seems to offer the promise of high quality treatment. Yet this treatment is an investment in more than a manicure or eyebrow shape, it entails not only a financial commitment but a psychological one too. Hair removal is so fundamental to the well-being of a many women with PCOS that the choice of laser/IPL provider is essential. But how can the prospective client differentiate between the plethora of services on offer. Research is vital and the best place to start is with the Care Quality Commission, the new name for the Healthcare Commission.

Before any establishment offers treatment using a laser or IPL system they must have prior registration with the Commission. The Commission registration certificate must, by law be displayed clearly on the premises. Operating without registration is illegal. Registration is arduous and expensive and bad practitioners do risk prosecution and operate without registration, make sure you don't fall into the trap of an unregistered salon.

Once a provider has gained registration with the Commission they are duty bound to comply with the Commissions quality assurance framework, known as the National Minimum Standards (NMS) this may also be referred to as the Standards For Better Health (SFBH). Each provider is assessed against these standards and a report of the Commission's findings is published. The Commission must inspect each establishment at least once every five years although the Commission conduct an annual risk assessment of each establishment. This risk assessment involves the provider completing self assessment forms and supplying the Commission with evidence to support their statements. If the Commission are not satisfied the salon will receive an inspection visit, this will be in addition to the five year compulsory visit. The published reports come in two formats an Inspection Report and a Regulatory Assessment Statement. The salon or clinic must make these reports available for clients, prospective clients and interested parties. The best providers make them available on their website in addition to on the premises, they are also available on the Commissions website and hard copies can be obtained by calling their Customer Careline. Reading these reports will give you a good insight into the professionalism of the salon or clinic.

How to Read the Commission Reports

Inspection Report

The inspection report will give a short background to the establishment for example the services the salon or clinic provides. The section headed main findings gives the inspector some flexibility to make comments they may feel appropriate for example "The service provider is to be commended on continuous development within the service." The main body of the report shows the areas of the NMS that have been assessed and the inspector's evaluation. The evaluation is divided into three categories, Standard Not Met, Standard Almost Met and Standard Met. The final section of the report is Requirements and Recommendations. Any breach in the NMS will be listed under Requirements along with the action the provider must take and the time scale within which the Commission require the breach to be rectified. The provider is bound by Law to carry out these requirements. Failure to do so may lead to cancellation of the registration.

Any areas of non compliance outstanding since the last report are also listed. The Recommendations section covers improvements, which the Inspector thinks will help to improve the service but are not compulsory.

Regulatory Assessment Statement

This statement is much shorter than a full Inspection Report it again has background information and lists the Conditions of Registration for example the equipment the establishment is registered to use. However the report then simply describes the information which has been taken into account in the risk assessment process.

What other information should a salon or clinic provide you with?

Each provider must produce a Client Guide sometimes this can be called Patients Guide. This document must tell you the purpose of the salon or clinic for example the Mission Statement or vision, the services they provide, how to make comments and suggestions to the salon about the service they provide or directly to the Commission. This document must give details of the Commissions address and how to obtain Inspection Reports.

The establishment must conduct an annual client survey and formulate the findings into a report. This Client Survey Report must also be made readily available to clients, prospective clients and interested parties.

Quality assurance is the main stay of the Commissions purpose and as such all providers are required to conduct an annual Audit Report. This report should look at the clinical outcomes of treatment and assess whether the salon or clinic are producing the results they claim. For instance if an IPL provider is making claims that they can complete a full beard removal in 6 sessions they must assess themselves against this performance indicator and prove that they have quality assurance systems in place.

Continuous improvement is the landmark of the very best establishments in any walk of life. Clinical Governance is the term used in healthcare to describe the process of continually striving to improve the service you provide. The Clinical Governance Report will pull together the efforts that have been made over the previous year to improve the service and covers every area of the business from installing new computer systems to improved client information.

So you see there is a great deal of information that you can use to assess the value of any laser or IPL provider. You must ask yourself if they cannot supply you with this information why not? Maybe they are not as committed to providing quality assured treatment as they may claim. The best advice would be "go to someone who can".

You can check Care Quality Commission registrations and view reports under Private and Voluntary Healthcare at www.cqc.org.uk. or ring the Care Quality Commission Customer Careline on **03000 616161**