The ‘wrinkle fillers’ that can cause brain damage

By Claire Coleman

A SHOCKING report has already linked anti-wrinkle dermal fillers to permanent blindness in three patients. Now a leading cosmetic surgeon has claimed there have been at least 20 cases of vision loss — and that the injections have also caused strokes in some patients.

“These are not case-in-point instances,” says Clare De Silva, a London-based plastics and reconstructive surgeon, who has studied facial procedures.

Fillers are injectable substances that are injected under the skin to add volume and create a plumped, youthful appearance.

Almonds, breast implants, they represent a third of all reconstructive cosmetic procedures carried out in Britain.

The value of the UK cosmetic procedures market was £2.2 billion in 2013, it is estimated that figure will grow to £2.6 billion by 2018. Next expected surgical procedures accounted for 78% of the total.

Yet because fillers are legally classed as incurable rather than drugs, they are not subject to the same regulations and as such can legally be injected by anyone, anywhere, at any time.

The jaws are behind the touch most treat your phenomenon, where the gel is injected into the lips in order to enlarge the area.

However, the outcome can often look cartoonish and unnatural. Depending on the type of gel used, the result — no matter how good — can be permanent.

In 1995, after his third surgery Mr Silva, famously suffered the "tree root" effect having his lips injected with liquid silicone by a plastic surgeon.

Yet a poor cosmetic result is just one of the problems associated with the persistent placebo study, where fillers are accidently injected into an artery, explains Mr De Silva.

"This can lead to necrosis, or death, of the tissue, and if they're near the supply oxygen to the brain, it can lead to loss of vision. In a worst-case scenario, filler can even block oxygen supply to the brain, resulting in a stroke.

"Aside from the recent three cases of blindness, there were similar claims in 2012. One report highlighted 21 cases, while the second study reviewed 11 incidents of permanent vision loss after filler injections.

"There have also been at least four expected instances of stroke, in which the blockage in the blood supply leads to loss of vision and brain damage. Those were the result of filler registered with the patients' own fat taken from their own body, claims Dr De Silva.

"This is lack of regulation, under-stepping of complications of cosmetics, and manufacturers have no obligation to publish details of problems.

"Because these side effects are under-reported, many practitioners don’t even know there are other outcomes. If they’re happening, they have a plan of action for the patient, should they occur.

"This is the UK, more than 120 fillers are licensed for use, yet in the United States, there is no licensed. In the UK, in 2011, 2,000 fillers, Novolax, manufactured by Merz Pharmaceuticals, was withdrawn from use, seven months after being licensed to patients experienced with leaving the jaw completely numb, turning towards the skin.

"Two years earlier, the US Food and Drug Administration, the FDA, said the popular Botox filler, used to smooth the forehead, should not be used in this way because it could cause permanent nerve damage in the face.

"Both incidents were feared that UK consumers were being used as guinea pigs.

"Other doctors have raised concerns about delayed reactions to new-to-the-market fillers that are replacing existing fillers, such as the plastic surgeons who have injected the drug near a tooth.

"Dr Darren McKinnon, a cosmetic dermatologist in London's Harley Street and Graduate of the Royal College of Medical Professionals, dealing with these delayed side effects was a reaction to a characteristic problem the other risk of it happening, they have a plan of action for the patient, should they occur.

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Bad Botox: The 'wrinkle fillers' that can cause brain damage and lead to vision loss

- Dr Julian De Silva claims been at least 30 cases of vision loss
- He says anti-wrinkle dermal fillers have also cause strokes in patients
- Fillers represent third of all non-surgical cosmetic procedures in Britain

By Claire Coleman


Trout pout: Actress Leslie Ash had a botched lip filler injection by a doctor who used liquid silicone

A shocking report has already linked anti-wrinkle dermal fillers to permanent blindness in three patients.

Now a leading cosmetic surgeon has claimed that there have been at least 30 cases of vision loss – and that the injections have also caused strokes in some patients.

‘These are not one-in-a-million instances,’ claims Dr Julian De Silva, a London-based plastic surgeon who specialises in facial procedures.
Fillers are gel-like substances that are injected under the skin to add volume and give a plump, youthful appearance.

Alongside Botox, they represent a third of all non-surgical cosmetic procedures carried out in Britain.

The value of the UK cosmetic procedures market was £2.3 billion in 2010, and it is estimated that figure will grow to £3.6 billion by 2015. Non-surgical procedures account for 75 per cent of the total.

Yet because fillers are legally classified as implants rather than drugs, they are not subject to the same regulations, and as such they can legally be injected by anyone – trained or otherwise.

The jabs are behind the much derided ‘trout pout’ phenomenon, where the gel is injected into the lips in order to enlarge the pout. However, the outcome can often look cartoonish and unsightly. Depending on the type of gel used, the result – no matter how garish – can be permanent.

In 2000, actress Leslie Ash famously suffered the ‘trout pout’ effect after having her lips injected with liquid silicone by a Venezuelan doctor.

Yet a poor cosmetic result is just a minor complication compared with the potential risks involved. ‘The problem comes when filler is accidentally injected into an artery,’ explains Dr De Silva.

‘This can lead to necrosis, or death of the skin tissue, and if they’re the arteries that supply oxygen to the back of the eye, this can lead to loss of vision. In a worst-case scenario, filler can even block oxygen supply to the brain, resulting in a stroke.’

Aside from the recent three cases of blindness, there were similar claims in 2012 – one report highlighted 32 cases, while the second study revealed 12 incidents of spontaneous, permanent vision loss after filler injections.

There have also been at least four reported instances of stroke, in which the blockage in the blood supply leads to tissue death and brain damage. These were the result of filler injections of the patients’ own fat taken from another part of their body, claims Dr De Silva.
Due to lack of regulation, under-reporting of complications is common, and manufacturers have no obligation to publish details of problems.

‘Because these side effects are under-reported, many practitioners don’t even know that there’s a risk of them happening, let alone have a plan of action for when they do,’ warns Dr De Silva.

In the UK, more than 120 fillers are licensed for use, yet in the United States only 21 can be used. In the UK in 2010, one filler, Novabel, manufactured by Merz Pharmaceuticals, was withdrawn just seven months after being licensed as patients experienced swelling and hard lumps forming beneath the skin.

Two years ago, Q-Med, the company behind the popular Restylane fillers, advised that another of its products, Macrolane, originally designed to be used in breast augmentation, should not be used in this way because it could hamper breast cancer diagnosis.

Both incidents fuelled fears that UK consumers were being used as guinea pigs.

Other doctors have raised concerns about delayed reactions to new-to-the-market fillers that can cause sudden pain and disfiguring swelling months after being injected.

Dr Darren McKeown, a cosmetic doctor who has clinics in London’s Harley Street and Glasgow, says: ‘As a trained medical professional, dealing with delayed inflammatory reactions is a challenging medical problem and I have serious concerns that less qualified practitioners might not have the requisite skills to cope, or that many may simply refuse to take responsibility for such a delayed side effect.’

Dr De Silva advises: ‘You should know before your procedure exactly what is going to be injected into your face and what the side effects could be.

‘I suggest using only hyaluronic acid-based fillers as these can be broken down if the patient has a reaction to them, and only having fillers that have been approved in the US because they have a good safety record.

‘And make sure you’re in the hands of a qualified medical professional with knowledge of the anatomy of the face.’

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