NUMB AND NUMBER.....My thoughts on anesthesia.
For years, my students and other artists have asked me about my perspective on the many different approaches to anesthetics in our industry, so here it is...I think that safety should always be everyone’s main concern, next comes outcome, then comfort. The truth is, beauty can be painful and anything worth having does not always come easily...not that permanent make up should hurt, but I never promise that it is pain free.

Recently I attended some classes and hands-on workshops that exposed me to a variety of different products and techniques. It was interesting and a good learning experience and has inspired me to share my thoughts on this particular subject.

It's true that administering pain control products is important, however, we all need to be cognizant of the effects they may have on the pH of the skin, the concentration level of the pigments we are using and communicate with our patient that they MAY STILL FEEL something.

Of course we want our clients to be comfortable, but it’s easy to get side-tracked and lose focus of why they are in our office in the first place, and that’s to have us implant beautiful, lasting safe color. While attending this workshop, I witnessed technicians GLOB mass amounts of unnecessary numbing agents on to the lash lines of the models all the way up to the brow. It looked like white spackle or vanilla yogurt spread over the entire eye socket, which to me posed a bigger threat of melting into the eye. I will address this more below. At this point, I was reminded that the person hosting the event also “sold” the numbing products, so the more used, the more sold. Hey, this is the good old USA and I’m all for free enterprise, so, sell away. As a matter of fact, if it were not for some of the very progressive and innovative entrepreneurs in our industry, we’d still be rubbing ice cubes and dental “hurricane” on our clients. On the other side of that argument, one could go broke just purchasing numbing agents if we are not careful. Not to mention the safety threat.

That being said, we need to remember there is a cornea under the lid that we are working on. The cornea is responsible for 30% of our vision. Even our safest products can compromise the health and integrity of the corneal epithelial layer if overused. PROCEED WITH CAUTION. LESS IS MORE.

For an eyeliner procedure, I recommend that all technicians start by applying a moderate “bead” of an over-the-counter product (usually a Lidocaine 3%, Tetracaine 2% combo) to the lash line. Allow this first application to saturate and desensitize the clean lash line for approx. 10 minutes. Then, using either a stippling or rolling technique, make a delicate shallow pass across the lash line to disrupt the tissue enough to apply a layer of a lidocaine/epinephrine product. Some products work best when the skin has been disrupted. There are a few techniques to this approach. When disrupting skin other than the lash line, some artists prefer to buff the skin with what looks like a finger nail buffer, others will use a dry needle. My favorite technique is to use either a 0.5 or 1.0 derma roller on clean skin before applying the anesthetic of choice. The micro needles create an even aeration pattern across the epidermises just enough to allow for a proper saturation of a pre-numbing agent. After a 10 minute wait time, I then make a gentle 1st pass, then apply a more aggressive anesthetic agent.
Again, allow this mixture to saturate into the tissue for at least 5 minutes. Remember, we have a limited window of time to get in and get out! The skin can only be desensitized for a short period of time and it's imperative that the color goes into the intended layer of skin before the histamines rise to the surface. Working on a swollen lid, filled with fluid is a waste of time and is usually caused by overworking the tissue. Try to make every pass count and don't forget that your client trusts you with not only the permanent make up design, but with the health of the tissue you are working on.

Next, I'd like to address stretch and grip. Body artists oftentimes will use vasoline to help their needles glide over large areas and to ease in their shading techniques. We are not body tattoo artists. We work in small areas with different products, different machines, different needles, and in most cases, on different areas of the body. A slippery, slimy, product is really not our friend as we need to have a good, taut stretch to be effective. I personally do not use ointment based anesthetics during my procedures for the following 2 reasons;
  a. I cannot get a good grip which compromises my stretch
  b. It wastes precious time. I've observed trainers try to teach students to use 5 different numbing agents during 1 procedure. In my opinion, this is unnecessary. I've witnessed artists who are more fixed on keeping the client comfortable than doing a good procedure.

Tell yourself you have “X” amount of time to do your best work. Focus on creating your best possible work using only the necessary amount of numbing agent. Allow yourself to channel your energy into creating a beautiful design all while listening to and watching your client closely.