

# Choosing a Compounding Pharmacy

By *Pharmacy Creations*

Most products used in aesthetic mesotherapy are not available from commercial sources (i.e. pharmaceutical manufacturers), as they are generally not patentable and therefore cannot be exclusively manufactured by a single source. Therefore, these products must be compounded by a compounding pharmacist. Compounding is defined as “the act of preparing pharmaceutical components into medications, pursuant to an authorized prescriber’s prescription or medication order.”<sup>1</sup> Choosing a pharmacy to compound products for your mesotherapy practice is a more complex process and more critical than simply telephoning a “script” in to the local pharmacist. Very few pharmacists are skilled compounders and even fewer have the knowledge and experience to formulate and prepare injections for mesotherapy. You need the highest quality products for your patients, along with good service and the expertise of the pharmacist to complement your practice. Evaluating pharmacies and pharmacists requires that you ask questions. What standards do you follow? What is the experience of the pharmacists? How do you prepare your formulations? Do you regularly attend seminars on mesotherapy? Can I easily reach and communicate with the pharmacist? How is your service? Can I speak with some of your clients as references?

## **Standards:**

In January 2004 the United States Pharmacopeia, or USP, which is a book of standards of practice, enforceable by state and federal law, strengthened its guidelines for preparation of sterile products. The section covering sterile products, known as Chapter <797>, sets minimum standards for procedures, testing of products for sterility, and evaluation of equipment and personnel. Meeting USP Chapter <797> standards should be a goal of every pharmacist who prepares sterile products. Ask your pharmacist if his or her pharmacy is USP Chapter <797> compliant. While there are no set standards for the formulation content of mesotherapy compounds, there are standards for purity, sterility and potency. Ask about these standards.

## **Experience:**

Compounding is a topic covered on a limited basis in most colleges of pharmacy in the United States. For a pharmacist to become proficient in compounding he or she must seek out and attend compounding training, experiential and didactic. In addition, he or she must gain proficiency in aseptic compounding. To understand and work with physicians who perform mesotherapy, the pharmacist must further have experience in providing and formulating products for mesotherapy. Having all these attributes makes the perfect pharmacist to prepare your mesotherapy compounds. It is up to you to ensure that your pharmacist meets these requirements. Ask them about their training.

## **Formulations:**

There is no “cookbook” standard of formulations for mesotherapy products. All formulations have been developed by compounding pharmacists through years of experience. Therefore, products will vary from one pharmacy to another, particularly when it comes to pH. At our pharmacy, we formulate our products to be within a pH range of 6 to 8 to maximize compatibility. When you select a pharmacy, use their products only. Mixing of products from different pharmacies in one syringe and one treatment increases your risk of incompatibilities, interaction and precipitation prior to injection. Ask your pharmacists how they formulate their products for compatibility.

## **Communication:**

Whether you are calling your bank, your insurance agency, or your local chain pharmacy, you know what it is like to be given the run-around. You speak to one person who forwards you to another, who then either keeps you endlessly on hold, transfers you again, or worse, drops your call. Your time is valuable, so when working with a compounding pharmacist it is important to find one who values your time and makes the ordering of your products simple (while still meeting regula-

tory requirements). When you have problems, concerns or requests for new formulations, you need to speak with someone who can provide answers quickly. Your compounding pharmacy should make the pharmacist readily available to help you.

**Service:**

Storing a warehouse full of products should not be your priority in growing your mesotherapy practice. You need your products delivered on a timely basis – turn-around time is important. From time to time there will be oversights, missing products, or wrong strengths, whether your staff made the error or the pharmacy did. A full service compounding pharmacy should resolve the problem for you without delay. Also remember, service includes not only providing you with products but being there to answer questions and give advice on formulas, preparation, and safe mixing of solutions. In addition, beware of pharmacies that claim they do not charge for shipping. Although a shipping charge may not appear on your bill, it is being built into the cost of products.

**Other Services:**

Mesotherapy may not be your only focus, and neither should it be for your compounding pharmacy. You may be involved, or may want to become involved in other areas – antiaging medicine, bio-identical hormone replacement therapy, chelation, sclerotherapy, prolotherapy, or pain management. Choose a compounding pharmacist with knowledge and ability to provide other areas of practice. This simplifies the ordering process for you and your staff with “one-stop-shopping.”

**References:**

Mesotherapy is a hot area in compounding pharmacy and more and more pharmacists are trying to make their way into it every day. The risk to you and your practice is that you end up working with a pharmacist who has limited experience, limited formulas and no track record with other physicians. The top compounding pharmacies have been compounding solutions for at least five years. Ask your pharmacist for names of physicians and clinics he or she works with. Ask whom you may contact for a feedback on quality, ease of communication, service and experience.

**Summary:**

You will notice that there has been no mention of price. In fact, this should be your last consideration. You may find variations in price, and be sure to look carefully when making comparisons. Consider vial size along with price when comparing compounding pharmacies. Remember, however, that a \$5 difference in price from one 30ml vial of typical product translates into a difference of 30 cents in administration cost. The most important consideration should be quality – quality of products, standards, experience, formulations, communication and service. A compounding pharmacist is an important resource in the growth and development of your practice. Select wisely and work closely with him or her and your mesotherapy practice will grow and prosper.

1.Statutes and Regulations New Jersey Board of Pharmacy, Section 13.39-1.2

