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Inside CST

Home

Current Issue

Practice Management

Special Reports

Previous Issues

News

News

E-News

Meetings

New Products

New Products

Clinical Articles

Anti-Aging

Blepharoplasty

Body

Breast

Face

Other

Classifieds

Career Opportunities

Products and Services

Classifieds Home

Contact Sales

Editorial Resources

Editorial Advisory Board

Editorial Team

Customer Service

Subscriptions

Advertiser Resources

Sales Team

Marketing Services

Lists

Reprints

Digital Ad Specs

Websites
For Cosmetic Surgeons

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Liposuction refined

Plastic surgeon develops twin-cannula design, which allows for faster, more effortless and less traumatic liposuction procedures

Nov 14, 2007

By: Lisette Hilton

Cosmetic Surgery Times

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Pages | 1 | 2 [more](#) »

Always a tinkerer, Robert Louis Cucin, M.D., was kicked out of middle school for making a radio-controlled stink bomb. The plastic, reconstructive and general surgeon and clinical instructor at Cornell Medical School, Manhattan, says his father, an electrical engineer, asked only one question when the principal summoned him for his son's mischief.

"My father asked the principal if I had used the AM band or the FM band. When he was told that I had used the FM band (which was pretty swift on my part) he wasn't as angry," the surgeon recalls with a chuckle.

Dr. Cucin has since graduated with a medical degree from Cornell Medical College; a law degree from Fordham Law School, Manhattan; and an MBA from Columbia University, New York City. A quarter century into his practice as a plastic surgeon, this 60-year-old Mensa member is betting that his latest venture, BioSculpture Technology, is the answer to liposuction.

START WITH THE PROBLEM Dr. Cucin's inventor's wheels started turning in 1990, when after two liposuction procedures (about eight hours in the operating room), Dr. Cucin lost more weight than both of his patients. The rigor he used to rid his patients of their body fat left him tired, dehydrated and thinking that there must be a better way.

LIPO ÉLAN "I wanted to come up with a way to make liposuction simply more elegant, with a lot less risk and effort for the surgeon," Dr. Cucin says.

The problem, he says, is that surgeons who perform liposuction have to shove cannulas back and forth underneath the skin thousands of times during each liposuction procedure.

"Every time the doctor pushes it forward, he is bruising the tissue and possibly injuring blood vessels and causing bruising and swelling," Dr. Cucin explains.

"Most surgeons find liposuction physically demanding. Sustained exertion and physical fatigue may result in compromised results, and liposuction's strenuous nature induces a tremor, which can affect your scheduling."

What's worse, he says, is that liposuction is traumatic for patients. Liposuction patients are swollen and sore for weeks, post-operatively. Aesthetic outcomes may be less than optimal — characterized by an uneven, wavy and lumpy appearance. Larger-volume liposuction procedures pose the risk of significant blood loss for patients, and revisions and touch ups are common.

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"Taking this as a basic scenario, you want to make things better," he says.

THE LIGHT BULB Dr. Cucin says that single-tube reciprocation is not the whole answer. "The vibrating cannula moves through the tissue with a little less resistance, but you really have not saved the doctor the effort or the patient the trauma of those thousands of to-and-fro motions.

The only thing that really can change that is when you can move it back and forth two inches — similar to a normal surgeon's stroke. And the only way you can do that safely is to ensheath the tube [a tube within a tube] that is moving," he says.

Dr. Cucin explains that he believes he has solved the problem by creating exactly that: a twin-cannula design, which allows for faster, more effortless and less traumatic procedures with more precise fat removal.

"Every time it moves forward, it is not shoving into the patient; you are merely positioning the outer tube where you want to remove the fat," Dr. Cucin says.

Using his technology, surgeons save themselves and their patients thousands of these back and forth blows. "Here, you have a machine," he says. "You put it where you want it and are really just concentrating on sculpting as if you were using an electric sander, unleashing the artist in the surgeon."

TO MARKET, TO MARKET BioSculpture Technology, which started as a way to make his own liposuction practice easier and to improve results, has blossomed into a commercial venture.

Pages | 1 | 2 [more](#) >>

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[Inside CST](#)
[Home](#)
[Current Issue](#)
[Practice
Management](#)
[Special Reports](#)
[Previous Issues](#)
[News](#)
[News](#)
[E-News](#)
[Meetings](#)
[New Products](#)
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[Anti-Aging](#)
[Blepharoplasty](#)
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[Breast](#)
[Face](#)
[Other](#)
[Classifieds](#)
[Career Opportunities](#)
[Products and
Services](#)
[Classifieds Home](#)
[Contact Sales](#)
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[Editorial Advisory
Board](#)
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Pages | 1 | 2 [more »](#)

As its founder and CEO, Dr. Cucin has scaled down his Palm Beach, New York City and Beverly Hills practices to focus on liposuction patients and to market the technology. BioSculpture Technology earned 510(k) clearance by the FDA in 2005, which has opened the door for U.S. sales.

Dr. Cucin is marketing primarily to plastic surgeons — targeting upcoming plastic surgery meetings — but says that any doctor who does liposuction is a potential candidate.

While the device is the brainchild of Dr. Cucin, he sought help, he says, from about 25 engineers in developing it.

But unlike many entrepreneurs who seek investors, Dr. Cucin has funded this business with money from his own pocket — to the tune of \$4 million.

"This is beyond what most people could, should or would desire to do," he says. "I went to Columbia and picked up an MBA focusing on entrepreneurial studies and finance. I'm not risk averse when it comes to a venture I believe in so strongly as this one."

NEXT GENERATION A handful of surgeons were using the technology a few months after the product launched commercially. The complete BioSculpture Technology set — which includes a handpiece, controller, four different size cannula pairs, the connector that goes between the controller and handpiece, a year's warranty, and a complimentary custom storage/carrying case — is priced in the mid-30 thousand dollar range.

Though Dr. Cucin founded the company in 2001, inventing, he says, has been a life-long interest. He has many other patents under his first company, Rocin Laboratories (now the parent company of BioSculpture Technology), and receives royalties from several of the current single-cannula, power-assisted liposuction devices on the market manufactured under license.

The BioSculpture Technology device available today is the result of four years of research and development.

"There are now 16 patents on this, and this is not just for liposuction. This is basically a tissue removal platform that can also apply to gynecology and urology," Dr. Cucin says.

"What's particularly interesting about this is, since you have a tube-within-a-tube design, you can incorporate bipolar cautery and curved cannulas. The next thing that we bring

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through the FDA will be a modular attachment to this that allows us to stop all bleeding."

IT AIN'T EASY Dr. Cucin says the most challenging part of this journey has been technically achieving what he has.

"It's easy to say, 'moving a tube within a tube' except the technology was simply not yet developed — which is why it took 16 patents," he says.

"Achieving BioSculpture Technology took a phenomenal amount of time, money and interactions with different people involving closed feedback loops, computer programming and material constraints."

Dr. Cucin says that, three marriages later, he has been a devoted, fearless entrepreneur and inventor.

"I've always assumed that my degrees have earning power behind them, so I have never been afraid to take a risk," he says.

He recommends that other inventors consider licensing their inventions for royalties, rather than assuming all the risk and expenses for marketing and more.

Still, he is nothing but confident about the advantages his patented and trademarked platform, Airbrush Liposculpture[®], offers both patient and surgeon.

"In my brain, I already have the next two iterations of this," he says.

For more information

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