

DR. G & THE WOMEN

Meet the plastic surgery team—
doctor, nutritionist,
stylist—taking on Manhattan.

By Danielle Stein

Hillary Clinton said of child rearing, “It takes a village.” The same could be said of personal maintenance. Every woman has a team—stylists, doctors, fitness professionals—and even though they’re working independently, they’re really all driving toward the same goal.

Yet it’s rare for the members of a woman’s team to communicate directly with one another. This is too bad, according to Dr. Robert

Grant, chief of plastic surgery at New York–Presbyterian/Columbia and Weill Cornell Medical Center. Years ago Grant, who does all types of reconstructive and cosmetic surgery, including breast enlargements and reductions, breast lifts, tummy tucks, thigh lifts, and liposuction, developed the term “life-stage personal enhancement” to describe his belief that people should take incremental steps at every age to improve their look, rather than relying on total surgical overhauls in middle age to turn back the clock. “Reality television,” he says, “has made it clear that extreme makeovers work great for houses, but not necessarily for people.”

Which is why he entered into collaborations with nutritionist Brooke Alpert and stylist Jacqui Stafford, two people he feels can drive home to his patients their capacity for self-improvement before, after, and sometimes instead of surgical procedures. He refers to the trio as the Life Stage Personal Enhancement Team, and it offers collaborative services to clients who approach any of the three. “It’s not like I’m going to meet a new patient and scream, ‘Stylist, we have a stat ugly alert in room two!’” Grant insists. “Having said that, I can say to someone who wants liposuction, ‘Look, you’d be a much better surgical candidate if we could knock off 20 pounds first, and I have a colleague who can help you do that.’”

Alpert, a 31-year-old registered dietitian and a new mother, is the founder of B Nutritious, on Manhattan’s Upper East Side. She’s known among her local clientele for her sensible, tailored approach (“If I have a client who says, ‘I’ll change anything, but don’t take my red wine from me,’ I certainly won’t ask them to go dry!”) and the speed with which she responds to frantic e-mails (if someone pleads, “Help! I’m at Elio’s—what should I eat?” Alpert will use her discerning eye to evaluate the options on MenuPages). She and Grant met through several patients they shared and realized the potential for a symbiotic relationship. “I have clients who lose a great deal of weight, but they can’t lose that extra skin,” Alpert says. “And I

can get them to their lowest ideal healthy body weight, but I still can’t help them with the bat wings or loose stomach that remains.” Similarly, Grant says that after his job is done a nutritionist is key, as patients sometimes get complacent and gain weight after surgery, and that weight tends not to come back in attractive ways. “After, say, a tummy tuck, fat will accumulate in areas that may look out of proportion—maybe you used to gain in your stomach, but now it could come back in your hips or thighs,” he warns.

The icing on the cake, as the three like to call her, is Stafford, who has logged countless hours on morning shows dressing women who have recently lost many pounds. “I’ve found that, after people put all this money and time and effort into changing their bodies, many of them suddenly develop body dysmorphia—they’re dressing for their old size!” says Stafford, who is plucky, blonde, and British.

The consequences of this can be devastating. “Let’s say you get a breast enhancement, but you’re still wearing smaller bras and they’re too tight,” Grant says. “Suddenly you have skin hanging over in the back, and you start to feel that something else is wrong or that you regret the surgery.” He has realized over the years that a patient won’t be totally happy with her new body unless she learns how to dress for her new shape.

Sometimes, Grant cheerfully admits, his collaborative approach will cost him patients. In his opinion, many of the people who enter his office don’t need plastic surgery at all. “I say no to a lot of people. And now I can say, ‘There’s no obligation to use it, but I do have someone else here who can give you a solution that isn’t going to require you to undergo surgery. Look, there are genetic realities, bone structures, that no surgeon can change. I can move a little bit of tissue here and there, but here’s someone who can help you dress to camouflage those things or make them work better for you.’”

Grant can’t count the number of people who have come to him before even trying to lose weight. “They’ll say, ‘Just fix me: Make my

Dr. Grant believes that people should take incremental steps to improve their look, rather than relying on a total surgical overhaul in middle age to turn back the clock. “Reality television has made it clear that extreme makeovers work great for houses, but not necessarily for people,” he says.

tummy tight, lift my breasts back up.’ The truth is, if someone has 30 pounds of baby weight to lose, it’s premature, at the very least, for me to offer those services.” (Grant notes that it’s important to get close to an ideal weight before, not after, surgery; those who lose a lot of weight after surgery can end up with excess skin, which can require an additional procedure.)

At its most basic, the Life Stage Personal Enhancement Team functions as a referral network; all three members routinely hear client complaints that should be directed to the other two. (A referral from one partner to another earns clients special rates.) But Grant’s surgical

bromelain-rich foods for healing. Stafford visits with racks of clothes to help sort out the patients’ new look. “When people have just had surgery, it’s a great time for me to come talk to them,” Alpert says. “I’ve found that people are more open to change when they’re feeling a bit vulnerable. This is when I can actually make a dent in the way they’re thinking.”

To Grant, Alpert, and Stafford, their partnership is logical. Indeed, they feel that such interdisciplinary collaborations should be the standard. But they’re not yet—perhaps because, in contrast to Grant, many surgeons do not care to admit that addressing a patient’s



Jacqui Stafford, Brooke Alpert, and Dr. Robert Grant in a suite at the Pierre Hotel in Manhattan. Patients who work with them can sign up for a supervised—and luxurious—recovery at the hotel.

patients also have the option of signing up for the total package: surgery followed by several days of supervised recovery in a suite at the Pierre Hotel in Manhattan. During this phase, Alpert conducts counseling sessions and plans patients’ meals with the Pierre kitchen, making sure that menus are loaded with zinc- and

body issues is rarely a one-person job. Or, at least, it shouldn’t be. “I am an interventionist—I intervene at a specific point—but what Brooke and Jacqui do can help before, during, and after that point,” he says. “It just became clear that I needed more than surgery to help make my patients complete.”

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