

# Digital Discussions

Nervous – or unsure – about a virtual consultation?  
Read one patient's advice on what to expect

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Debbie and Miss Balaratnam during their virtual consultation.

**T**hroughout the pandemic, access to services we took for granted were closed off to us. No longer could we enjoy a meal out with friends, get our hair done or go for a mooch around the shops. Takeaways, boxed hair dye and next-day delivery became our best friends, acting as good substitutes for our usual indulgences.

But aesthetic treatments – they were a no-go. Like other businesses, clinics across the country have been forced to shut their doors on and off for the past year, leaving their loyal patients desperate for their regular treatment top-ups and those thinking about starting their aesthetic journey wondering how to start!

The skincare market saw a boom as more people began noticing skin and ageing concerns while constantly staring at themselves on video calls, and practitioners worked hard to keep their businesses afloat by offering virtual consultations to recommend skincare and book appointments

for when clinics could reopen.

The success of virtual consultations has meant that many aesthetic practitioners have decided to continue offering them even when things are back to normal. Saving time for both you and them, a video call has proven to be just as effective as meeting in real life. Some of you may, however, be a little put off by going digital – preferring to meet in person and wondering whether a practitioner will really be able to assess your concerns as well as they could face-to-face.

Debbie was one of these women. At 53 years old, with two children who were now more independent at ages 11 and 13, she was ready to venture into aesthetic treatment in 2020. But how could she with clinics closed? Debbie started researching treatment options and suitable practitioners during lockdown, with the hope of booking an appointment for when clinics reopened.

## Debbie's concerns

Debbie started having botulinum toxin – anti-wrinkle injections commonly known by the brand name Botox with other brands available – in her early 30s. She says, “I loved it, but when I became pregnant at 39 it all changed.”

Unable to have regular top-ups throughout her pregnancy, Debbie thought she'd get back to it as soon as the baby was born. “Instead, my appearance went completely out of the window as the baby took over,” she explains.

Her second daughter came just two years later, and Debbie found the next 10 years preoccupied with work and bringing up children, with not much time for herself.

“Then the menopause happened,” she says, emphasising, “Oh my goodness, it was tough.

You go through all the hormonal changes which are difficult enough to deal with, along with a drastically ageing face. It was like I'd transformed into an old person overnight!”

The menopause most often begins between the ages of 45 and 55, as a woman's oestrogen levels decline. This leads to decreased levels of collagen and elastin, which give the skin its structural support. This is why women will notice deeper lines and wrinkles appearing, and their skin start to sag as its youthful volume is lost, resulting in jowl formation (sagging skin below your chin or jawline).

“For me, the jowling was the worst,” says Debbie, explaining, “You expect some wrinkles and I've always looked at them as a life well-lived, especially smile lines! But the sagging just made me feel and look grumpy and old. My lips also thinned, and my lines had gotten



Images show Debbie's face from the left before and after treatment with botulinum toxin and hyaluronic acid dermal filler.

deeper. I was frustrated as I'd always looked after my skin, eating healthily and avoiding too much sun exposure, so I was shocked when the changes occurred so quickly."

Debbie's general assumption was that the jowls could only be addressed with a surgical facelift, which didn't appeal to her. Instead she looked into getting her lips done to add that lost volume and having toxin treatment to address the lines and wrinkles. "I never even considered filler anywhere else – you just don't hear about it much," she says.

**"By the end of the video consultation, we were talking about something I didn't think could be achieved without surgery!"**

### The digital consultation

After significant research into suitable practitioners, Debbie found Miss Sherina Balaratnam, a surgeon and cosmetic doctor who runs the award-winning S-Thetics clinic in Buckinghamshire. She sent an email enquiry and was booked in for a virtual consultation.

For the 45-minute appointment, Debbie was asked to not wear makeup, tie her hair back and wear a plain black top so there wouldn't be a reflection or distracting pattern to contend with.

"I knew it was necessary as we were in the middle of the pandemic, but I was apprehensive that Miss Balaratnam would not be able to see my concerns properly and I'd have to be doing strange close-ups to the camera," says Debbie.

She needn't have worried, though. Miss Balaratnam simply conducted her assessment by talking to Debbie, taking her medical history and asking her about her concerns. While doing so, Miss Balaratnam observed how Debbie's facial features moved while she talked, as well as how they presented when she was still, in order to inform her recommended treatment approach.

Debbie notes that it was great not to have to leave the comfort of her own home, as well as avoiding the stress of finding the clinic and somewhere to park, before walking down the high street with no makeup on! Overall, she says, "It was brilliant – time was really invested in getting to know me, and I was surprised it wasn't all about looking at my face!" Just like a face-to-face consultation, along with Debbie's aesthetic concerns, Miss Balaratnam discussed her lifestyle, stress levels, eating habits and exercise, which can all have an influence on how we age.

"When she asked what I wanted to achieve from treatment, I immediately told her what I thought I needed – lip filler and toxin treatment.

However, she acknowledged that I had mentioned concerns with my jowls, which these procedures wouldn't address," explains Debbie. "I

referred back to my assumption that I'd need surgery," she says, "So that's when Miss Balaratnam explained the ageing process and all of the different treatment options available to me."

Miss Balaratnam detailed how collagen loss occurs with age, as well as how the bones in the face shrink with time, just as they do in the rest of the body. Miss Balaratnam said that by injecting certain points on the face with hyaluronic acid filler, Debbie's jowls could be lifted, along with the downward turn of her smile, eradicating the 'grumpy' appearance she was so fed up with.

She also talked through what products she would use – explaining all the potential side effects and complications that can occur.

"By the end of the video consultation, we were talking about something I didn't think could be achieved without surgery! I was so excited and delighted to feel my concerns were really understood," says Debbie, adding that it was also reassuring to recognise that she wasn't just being vain – her concerns were something many men and women experience as they age, which can have a negative effect on their self-esteem and confidence.



Images show Debbie's sun damage and redness improvement following an effective skincare routine using the iS Clinical range, visible via the VISIA Skin Analysis device.



## The face-to-face appointment

Debbie was booked in for a face-to-face appointment when restrictions lifted, and after she'd had time to really think about whether the treatment outlined was something she wanted to go ahead with, which she says it definitely was! When the day came, Debbie also underwent a VISIA Skin Analysis, which is a device that rotates around your face, taking multiple images which record and measure skin conditions. These include UV damage, spots, wrinkles, texture and pores. While not all clinics will have this technology, Miss Balaratnam offers it as part of her consultations as it allows patients to better understand their skin health. Debbie's VISIA Analysis results are shown in the pictures to your left.

"This was brilliant," says Debbie, explaining that even though she's used SPF and good skincare all her life, there was still sun damage visible, and the analysis made it obvious where she wasn't applying it properly, as the area around the edges of her face were more affected. "This allowed me to make simple yet effective changes to my skincare routine, as well as giving me the kick I needed to drink more water and eat healthier, as it was explained that this all has an impact on my skin," she says.

When it came to the treatment itself, everything went without a hitch! Debbie was then provided with written notes on her treatment, as well as being given aftercare guidance and a follow-up digital appointment. Debbie was delighted with the result, noticing an immediate improvement to her jowling, with the wrinkle-relaxing effects of toxin kicking in after a couple of weeks. And in the end, no lip filler was administered as the other treatments made the real difference Debbie was hoping for.



Images show Debbie's face from the right side before and after treatment with botulinum toxin and hyaluronic acid dermal filler.

## The result

"I felt so emotional afterwards," she says, noting, "I didn't want a new face – I've had this one for 50-odd years – I just wanted to look my best and the treatment allowed me to do just that. My whole perception of what can be achieved with aesthetic medicine has changed and I would definitely recommend considering it if you're looking for that confidence boost so many of us need as we age!"

She concludes, "Don't be put off by a virtual consultation – hopefully everyone's really used to video calls now and I think they're here to stay. They're so much more efficient and, if you go to a suitably-qualified practitioner who puts your needs first, then there's no reason why it won't be as effective as meeting in real life!"



Personalised online skin tests rose by **49.8%** in 2020 due to people becoming worried about **'Zoom Face'** and focusing on **self-care** during **lockdown**

*Study conducted by online skincare retailer Face the Future*



Miss Sherina Balaratnam, cosmetic doctor and surgeon, Buckinghamshire  
IG: @sthetics\_clinic

## Practitioner Perspective

I injected Debbie's temples and outer cheeks with a product called Juvéderm Voluma, which helped address the sagging and improve the structure she had lost with age. I then focused on her jawline – injecting Juvéderm Volux to add the definition Debbie desired. Optimising skin health is a key part of my practice, so I created a bespoke skincare routine for Debbie using the iS Clinical product range. I'm so glad she was pleased with her result and am looking forward to seeing her in future! For a full-face approach such as this, prices start at around £1,800. Results are expected to last 18-24 months, sometimes more.

The consultation is an essential part of an aesthetic treatment – it's so important that practitioners understand your requests, as well as your general health and lifestyle, to be able to offer the most effective results. I'd recommend having consultations with up to three different practitioners to find the right person for you. Of course, cost can be a barrier (I charge £100 per consultation), so bear this in mind.

In terms of digital consultations, they really are here to stay. I've found that patients are less nervous as they're in the comfort of their own homes and we can assess you just as well – perhaps easier without having to worry about face masks! To ease nerves, I share lots of educational videos on my YouTube and Instagram channels, as well as hosting 'In The Consulting Room' events to enlighten and empower patients to make safe and informed decisions.

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