

In search of eternal youth

Ivona Percec found in plastic surgery a way to unite art and science in terms of beauty.

Liz Sandra Santiago | liz.santiago@gfrmedia.com



The physician says it is possible to slow down the aging process.
(Alberto Bartolomei / Specially for GFR Media)

Aging is a very complex and multidimensional process, per doctor **Ivona Percec**, a professor of plastic surgery and a member of the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine's skin care program.

“It starts internally, it is not superficial. Involves bone structure, fat and the skin. It also ranges from a broader level to the cellular molecules. The way each person ages is very complex, so you have to analyze all of those components separately. If you treat all people in the same way, you will not be successful”, she says.

The expert explained that contrary to what was thought for many years, the genetic factor is not so influential in the way people age.

“Over time we have discovered that genetics only influences 25%. The rest is what we call epigenetics, which is everything that happens outside of genetics and the way genes regenerate. Thus, genes are regenerated by different things, such as exposure to the environment, how you treat your body, and many other factors not related to DNA.

“We can have better control, depending on the way we understand the aging process better”, she asserts.

To improve the skin's appearance it is necessary to identify what affects it beyond the passage of time. The doctor stresses that in order to recognize the problem it is necessary to make a three-dimensional evaluation in which the expert can analyze the volume in the deepest structure, and in the middle structure (where the muscles and fat are located), and see the skin's condition per se. It is important to examine these components and identify those who need treatments.

“The skin has to be treated in a multidimensional way. There is no single treatment or technique that can provide you the solution to the problems; it is necessary to use different tools like chemical peels, mechanical peels, microdermabrasion. They are elements that complement each other to achieve the desired effect. Solar protection is also very important because at some point we all have sun exposure”, realizes **Percec**.

The researcher currently divides her time between her clinical practice focused on cosmetic surgery and rejuvenation, her work as a teacher, and the laboratory where she performs research on how to treat and reverse the aging process.

There he handles research topics such as epigenetics, cellular aging and primary adipose tissues.

The physician says that it is possible to slow down the aging process, and although it seems repetitive, in order to achieve it, it is important to maintain a good exercise regime and be consistent, avoiding excesses, maintaining good nutrition, protecting oneself from the sun, and especially taking into account the importance of the emotional and psychological factor. That is why she recommends minimizing stress, as it has been proven to be a key factor in the subject of antiaging.

Percec, who is certified in plastic surgery by the American Board of Plastic Surgery and is the author of hundreds of scientific papers on the subject of skin care in important publications such as the journal Science, Aesthetic Surgery Journal, Annals of Plastic Surgery and others, assures that you should not think about plastic surgery solely on the issue of aging.

“The skin care program that I supervise at the University is very special not only in the region, but in the country. I work with surgical and non-surgical interventions. We regularly collaborate with other medical disciplines. For example, I can work with dermatologists who have treated patients who have had skin cancer removed and we are working on the reconstruction and the whole process to achieve skin regeneration, among many others that may be beneficial to the patient”.

Her career started during her youth

The doctor's career began as a result of her interest in science. However, his skills and inclinations also encompassed the world of arts and mathematics. That is why when she began to visualize her future he thought that plastic surgery was the specialty in which she could unite her big passions.

When she was in her fourth year of high school, she met the head of plastic surgery at the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio, and spent six weeks assisting him in his daily labors. She became almost his shadow and made every effort to learn.

“I returned to assist my mentor when I started college. That experience convinced me that plastic surgery fulfilled all the characteristics that I was looking for in a profession”, she recalls.

Her visit to the Island

Percec visited Puerto Rico to offer a seminar on aging and introduce the Glytone system **Dr. José Raúl Montes'** staff. Both professionals met during a "Cosmetic Bootcamp", a training initiative for plastic surgeons, dermatologists, ophthalmologists and facial plastic surgeons.

“These initiatives not only teach people who want to expand their knowledge in cosmetics, but also enable us to strengthen relationships with other highly respected specialists to improve our practice,” says **Montes**, a renowned ophthalmologist and specialist in eye and facial rejuvenation treatments.

In this first visit **Percec** introduced the Glytone system, aimed at improving the skin's appearance throughout the entire body through “peels” made from a variety of natural acids, such as glycolic, salicylic, mandelic, pyruvic and lactic acid, among others.

The ten treatments, exclusively used by aesthetic professionals, are specially designed for the face and body and work acne outbreaks, spots, fine lines of expression and wrinkles. They can be applied in areas such as hands, back, neck, face and around the eyes, a very delicate area.

“Glytone has changed my practice because it delivers truly effective, predictable, and secure results. In the past, chemical peeling was not very well understood. Some patients had good results, others did not. The recovery time was long and you had no quick way of knowing the results. This system is very effective and safer. Patients tolerate them better and, compared to others, it has a unique way of application”, explains **Percec**.

Both **Percec** and **Montes** confirm that if you combine “peelings” with a daily skin regimen you can get very positive results. “The key to healthy skin is to change the products according to the person's needs. If you always use the same ones, in the long run you will not see big changes in the skin. You have to continue stimulating so that it regenerates itself”, concludes **Percec**.