



# Easy on the Eyes

When the FDA needed help expanding the range of treatments available to patients living with HIV, they turned to Chelsea Eye & Cosmetic Surgery Associates.

BY JENNIFER SCHIAVONE

PEOPLE UNFAMILIAR WITH the challenges of living with HIV probably don't realize the importance of cosmetic surgery for the HIV+ community. Yes, HIV treatments have come a long way. But even the more successful ones put stresses on the body that can have an unfortunate side effect: a loss of fat cells in the face, resulting in sunken cheeks and a skeletal, wasted look. Cosmetic fillers like Radiesse and Sculptra, which are injected under the skin, can treat this loss of volume and appearance of premature aging.

When the FDA began a clinical study to approve Radiesse and other fillers for people with HIV, it asked Chelsea Eye & Cosmetic Surgery Associates for help. "They approached us because we had so many gay and HIV+ patients," says Dr. Joseph A. Eviatar, who joined the practice in 1993. "Radiesse wasn't approved for anything in this country, so we did one of the first clinical trials." The FDA subsequently approved it about four years ago. "We've been using Sculptra as well," says Dr. Eviatar. "We tend to do a lot of studies in general, but particularly regarding HIV because of the nature of our practice."

Currently, Dr. Eviatar and his colleague, Dr. Christopher T. Coad, a board-certified ophthalmologist, are making inroads in eye care, as well. Together, they're conducting a study on LASIK treatment for vision correction on HIV+ patients. The doctors have been administering LASIK since its initial FDA approval 10 years ago, but they're hoping that the data they're currently presenting on its use in HIV+ individuals will build on the initial FDA safety studies and fill in some gaps.

Dr. Eviatar says that the initial studies more or less excluded anyone with immune deficiency or any systemic disease that would potentially delay or alter healing. "They worried that the visual results wouldn't be the same, maybe the patients would be at higher risk for infection," says Dr. Eviatar. "Given that it's an elective procedure, nobody wanted to take a chance." But over the years, as they've learned more about the cornea and more about LASIK, Dr. Eviatar says that they've treated hundreds of HIV+ patients successfully.

Now Dr. Eviatar's team is conducting a more formal study that examines the vision data and can look at hundreds of patients over a roughly

five-year period. "We'll compare the patients who do and don't have HIV," says Dr. Eviatar, "and show that the results really are the same."

Dr. Eviatar stresses that HIV+ patients have the same concerns that lead them to seek cosmetic treatment as the rest of the community. "Most of our clients, even those with HIV," says Eviatar, "want to look young and competitive and look good and get dates." It is this sensitivity to the community's needs, Dr. Eviatar feels, that sets Chelsea Eye apart from other practices and makes working there particularly rewarding. In fact, Dr. Eviatar says that it has been a pleasure for him and for Dr. Coad to live in the community where they work. "It's rewarding to be here and see patients who have been coming to you for 10 or 15 years. We know most of our patients and we see them and we interact with them, whether it's at the Hamptons or Fire Island. They're our friends and our family."

Chelsea Eye & Cosmetic Surgery Associates celebrates its 20th anniversary of bringing eye care and cosmetic treatments to Chelsea's LGBT community this year. Learn more at [chelseaeeye.com](http://chelseaeeye.com).