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Dr. Anna Wooten, founder of Beleza Plastic Surgery, in her Wexford office.

Leaps &

Plastic surgeon builds esteem by breaking down barriers

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Dr. Anna Wooten consults with Mary Beth Fleming.



Dr. Anna Wooten with a cleft-lip child in Guatemala.

Photo courtesy of Dr. Wooten
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Geographic borders. Language barriers. Gender bias. Information disparities.

They all present challenges, and all have been transcended by Dr. Anna Wooten, who has made a career of helping people reconcile who they are with who they want to be.

The Russian-born plastic surgeon left Moscow 20 years ago with her sights set. The child of two doctors slid her foot into her parents' footprints at an early age, fascinated with anatomy and intrigued by the body's complexities.

"I wanted to understand medicine and make a difference for my family," she says.

She pursued a Western medical education in North Carolina, set on building a career that a strong-spirited woman might be swayed from in any European country. She landed in Western Pennsylvania for her general and plastic surgery residency at the University of Pittsburgh

For instance, she is a proponent of the Brazilian breast lift, using a woman's own natural tissue rather than implants to restore youthful shape.

Two years ago, Dr. Wooten ventured out on her own, establishing her Beleza Plastic Surgery practice based in Wexford and reaching into Fox Chapel and Butler as well. Choosing the name was simple, she says, reaching back to her time studying in Brazil to select the Portuguese word for "beautiful." The practice draws patients from the immediate area, as well as from Erie, Ohio, West Virginia and even Paris, as word of Dr. Wooten's work has reached back across the ocean that brought her here.

She reaches out as well, as a member of Surgicorps International, a team of philanthropic physicians, health

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Medical Center and quickly grew fond of the region, its people and its outlets for her love of biking.

"I truly feel like this society welcomes adventurous, goal-oriented people who want to build a future for themselves," she says of America.

Once in medical school at East Carolina University's Brody School of Medicine in Greenville, N.C., she settled on plastic surgery, as it challenged her medically and satiated her creatively.

"Plastic surgery allows me to be creative. Every surgery and case is different. In a way, I am like a sculptor redefining, recreating."

Dr. Wooten also spent months studying in Canada and Brazil, discovering less-invasive but equally effective techniques she embraced because they uniquely cater to female patients.

professionals and other volunteers that travels the world to offer free corrective surgeries and medical care in developing countries. Since 1994, the organization has performed more than 2,500 surgeries in 15 countries.

When the 56-member Surgicorps crew set down in Guatemala this August, Dr. Wooten was among them, working 12-hour days to repair cleft lips and palates and congenital hand defects so that the families who walked three to four hours with their afflicted children to reach the mission-based hospital could lead more normal, productive lives.

"I enjoy it very much," she says. "This is something I can give back, which is a very important part of being a doctor."

Whether volunteering some 2,000 miles away in South America or seeing patients back home in Pittsburgh, Dr. Wooten awakes each morning with her patients in mind, motivated by the improved esteem and quality of life she can help bring to them. >>>

Plastic Surgery Pointers

Are you a candidate for plastic surgery? Dr. Anna Wooten offers these simple guidelines for patients to follow when considering plastic surgery:

- Know what you really want and what your goal is. Be realistic.
- Understand that you will need recovery and down time following major procedures. Make work and child-care arrangements to allow yourself that time.
- Elect to have plastic surgery for the right reasons. Are you doing it to keep pace with a friend or please a husband, rather than to satisfy something in yourself?
- Be patient. Achieving your cosmetic goals can take time, and your overall well-being is most important.

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“Our patients define my practice.”

Only a handful of female plastic surgeons practice in the region, as the field remains male-dominated. Consequently, female patients are drawn to this mother of two grown children for breast augmentations, tummy tucks and “mommy makeovers.”

“She brings a different eye than her male counterparts,” says Andrea Smith, the practice’s cosmetic patient-coordinator, who has spent two decades working in plastic surgery settings. “She perceives things differently. She really is a pioneer in her field.”

“I think my patients like how approachable I am,” Dr. Wooten says, wrapping her European accent around the American phrase “warm and fuzzy.” “They can always reach me and are comfortable knowing that I’m available.”

Patient education is critical to the Beleza approach. Before any procedure happens, each patient is consulted with and educated about the medical and surgical options. Dr. Wooten practices with appreciation for the savvy that today’s patients possess.

“The Internet is an amazing power,” she says of the vehicle new patients often use to find her. “Patients are very educated in today’s world and are able to make their own assessments of what they want.”

As much as honed techniques and surgical instruments are the tools of her trade, equally important, she says, is honesty. “I like to develop mutual trust with my patients. I think they appreciate an honest answer.”

In fact, Dr. Wooten has been known to talk patients out of the surgery they have been dead-set on having. There may be a simpler or even completely different technique to get the desired results. And since most plastic surgery patients pay out of pocket for their care, she says, it’s important to her that they understand what they want and why they want it.

“Patients have to come in for the right reasons. They have to be changing for themselves, not for anyone else.”

Much like a young girl who dreams of becoming a doctor. **F**

