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Wrinkle Rivals Go to War

By NATASHA SINGER

COKE or Pepsi?

Mac or PC?

Restylane or Juv derm?

The last two products, cosmetic injections used to fill out facial creases and hollows, are hardly household names. But when the makers of Juv derm began giving away their product free to users of Restylane last month, they set off a marketing battle, which some see as the \$12-billion-a-year cosmetic medical industry's budding version of the cola wars.

With an estimated one million Americans using injections to smooth wrinkles and plump up skin, the makers of Juv derm have invited doctors to enroll up to 10,000 patients in a giveaway program for their product.

Robert Grant, the president of Allergan Medical, which makes Juv derm, said the free trial program — offered only to patients who have used Restylane, the leading facial filler — will provide the company with feedback about the new product, which was approved in June by the [Food and Drug Administration](#).

He said the giveaway is also part of a plan to make Juv derm a household name on a par with the company's blockbuster cosmetic injection, Botox.

But Medicis Pharmaceutical Corporation, which owns the American rights to Restylane, has denounced the giveaway, calling it biased, risky to patients and "a commercial platform under the guise of science."

To some doctors and industry analysts, the free Juv derm injections represent the opening salvo in a battle for dominance in the rapidly growing market for cosmetic facial injections, a competition expected to intensify as the F.D.A. approves other products.

Pharmaceutical company sales from fillers last year were estimated to be \$250 million, which is up from about \$100 million in 2003, said David Steinberg, an equity researcher in specialty [pharmaceuticals](#) at Deutsche Bank in San Francisco.

That does not include 2005 sales figures for the cosmetic use of Botox, a toxin injected into the skin, which performs a different function: relaxing the muscles underneath wrinkles. The sales of Botox for cosmetic use were estimated to be around \$360 million, he said.

Over all, there are no reliable statistics on how many filler treatments are administered because each patient requires different amounts. But Mr. Grant of Allergan said there are 27 million potential American customers for all injections.

Critics said the marketing of these products is an attempt by manufacturers to make cosmetic medical treatments seem less clinical, turning them into consumer brand names like those at department store beauty counters. Dr. Lawrence S. Reed, a plastic surgeon in Manhattan, likened the Juvēderm giveaway to the Pepsi Challenge.

“This is a foolish promotion that is going to start a war of injectables between Restylane and Juvēderm, which, like Coke and Pepsi, are essentially made out of the same ingredients, using slightly different formulas,” Dr. Reed said.

In a youth-dominated, celebrity-obsessed culture, aggressive marketing for medical products that can temporarily or even permanently augment the skin is hardly a surprise.

But with an increasing range of cosmetic medical procedures that promise to unfurrow wrinkles, spackle creases, fatten up lips and plump cheeks and other bits of flesh that abate with age, consumers are likely to have more of a challenge distinguishing the safest and most effective brand of treatment.

At the moment the injectable substances approved by the F.D.A. to fill out facial folds are collagen; several brands of hyaluronic acid; and ArteFill, tiny permanent beads suspended in a collagen solution. Other substances pending approval for cosmetic use include a more viscous hyaluronic acid called Perlane, and Radiesse, a paste containing calcium particles.

“We are in the age of fillers,” said Dr. Paul J. Frank, a dermatologist in Manhattan, who participated in the giveaway program, calling it “an excellent marketing ploy.” Dr. Frank added, “We are going to see much more market competition.”

Both Restylane and Juvēderm are transparent gels made of hyaluronic acid, a complex chain of sugar molecules, which is related to the same substance the human body produces to give structure to the skin. Unlike Botox, which works by temporarily paralyzing the muscles underlying wrinkles, injections of hyaluronic acid temporarily fill out depleted areas, adding volume to the skin.

“Hyaluronic acid is like the Jell-O molds you made as a kid that magically suspended pieces of fruit,” said Dr. Richard G. Glogau, a clinical professor of dermatology at the [University of California](#), San Francisco. Dr. Glogau has been paid to conduct research for Allergan and Medicis. “You are basically injecting more Jell-O soup into your skin.”

The cosmetic effects of such injections usually last up to six months or more, he said. Side effects have included swelling, bruising and lumpiness.

Restylane, approved in 2003 by the Food and Drug Administration to fill out facial wrinkles and folds, is also used by doctors to increase volume in the lips. Restylane represents about half the American filler market, said Mr. Steinberg of Deutsche Bank.

Medicis estimates that Americans had about 750,000 Restylane treatments last year. Patients pay about \$350 to \$800 for each syringe, depending on the doctor, and several syringes may be used, depending on the size of the treatment area.

Juv derm, which will not be widely available to doctors until January, uses a different formula, which makes its texture less thick. Doctors will pay \$242 for a syringe of Juv derm that is 20 percent smaller than a \$240 syringe of Restylane.

Introduced last month, the giveaway program, called the Juv derm Experience Trial, invited doctors to select six patients who used Restylane within the last year for free Juv derm injections in their smile lines.

Allergan declined to discuss specifics, but, according to protocols sent to participating doctors, up to 10,000 patients were to be enrolled by the end of last week and doctors must follow up the results for nine months. Mr. Grant of Allergan described the program as a way for doctors and patients to familiarize themselves with the new product and for the company to gauge its ease of use and longevity. But the giveaway is also an attempt to unseat Restylane as America's most popular facial filler.

"We are confident that patients who have had Restylane in the past are going to switch to Juv derm," Mr. Grant said.

Some patients who received the free treatments were enthusiastic.

"It's awesome to get it free," said Nancy Komar, a receptionist at a urology practice in Indian Creek, Neb. She received free Juv derm injections last month from Dr. Joel Schlessinger, a dermatologist in Omaha. "That's at least \$1,000 worth of free treatment."

But Medicis, the distributor of Restylane, sent out a warning letter last month to thousands of doctors, contending that the giveaway program is risky and that any data it collected would be biased and unscientific.

"There is no evidence that injecting their product on top of ours is safe," said Mitchell S. Wortzman, the executive vice president of Medicis. "And when you get a free treatment, you tend to favor the free treatment over the one you paid for."

Mr. Grant of Allergan said there is no safety issue because doctors in Europe who use the fillers sequentially have not seen complications.

Dr. Schlessinger said one benefit of the increasing filler market could be more head-to-head research by manufacturers.

“Finally some competition that should bring up the level of science, if the companies are bold enough to do a real comparative study,” said Dr. Schlessinger, who has been a paid consultant and researcher for Allergan and Medicis and owns stock in both companies.

But Dr. Mark G. Rubin, a dermatologist in Beverly Hills, Calif., cautioned that the marketing hype over fillers might make patients overlook the fact that these injections are medical procedures with potential risk.

“It’s an intriguing way of getting a new product out into the marketplace very early and convincing physicians and patients to try it,” said Dr. Rubin, who has conducted research for Medicis and is on its advisory board and who participated in the Juvēderm giveaway.

“But only time will tell whether this weird, not very scientific way of doing things becomes standard marketing practice, or whether other companies will shy away from it because it makes doctors uncomfortable.”