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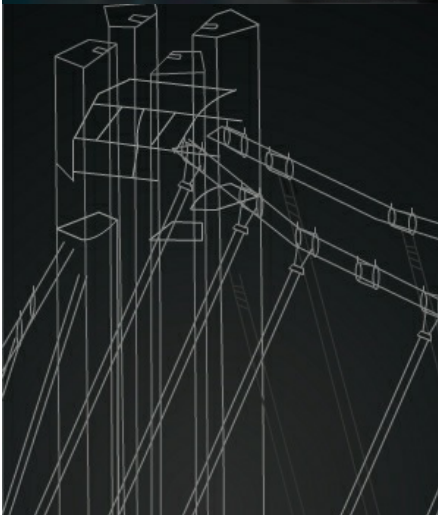
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Digital nose jobs may help docs, patients

By Alison McCook NEW YORK | Wed Nov 17, 2010 8:00pm EST

(Reuters Health) - Computer software that lets plastic surgeons "morph" patients' faces in photographs produces reasonably accurate predictions of what the real faces will look like after a nose job, according to a small study of 38 patients.

Patients satisfied with their results were more likely to have pre-surgery images that matched their post-surgery nose, as rated by a panel of surgeons, suggesting that accurate images make for happy customers, the authors conclude.

Furthermore, producing the pre-surgery images lets doctors identify those with unrealistic expectations before the real operation takes place, study author Dr. Andrew S. Frankel told Reuters Health.

Frankel said he uses computer imaging before nose jobs, or rhinoplasty, simply "because it really helps me as a surgeon to avoid headaches down the line."

For instance, if he shows patients images of themselves with a much smaller nose, and they still say it's too big, he knows they are probably not going to be happy with surgery.

Furthermore, it helps him "plan operations," added Frankel, a surgeon at the Lasky Clinic in Beverly Hills. Aesthetic changes are "very subjective," he explained, so what a patient describes may be very different from what he pictures, and having an image both agree on puts patient and surgeon "on the same page."

Many plastic surgeons now use the image-morphing technology, which enables surgeons to tweak patients' photographs to estimate their appearance after surgery.

The software used in the current study, from United Imaging Inc., costs doctors about \$4,000 to buy.

To evaluate how close these predictive images come to the final result, Frankel and his team compared the computer images of 38 patients to photos taken 6 months after their nose jobs.

They asked a panel of surgeons and a panel of non-surgeons to rate how similar the before and after images were. Rating the accuracy of the computer image between 1 and 5, with 5 being identical, the expert panel awarded an average of 3.1, or "moderately accurate," Frankel said.

The non-surgeons, on average, gave the images a score of 3.6, according to the report in the Archives of Facial Plastic Surgery.

Eleven out of the 38 patients completed surveys, and 9 said they would recommend the computer imaging process to someone planning a nose job.


Overall, patients said they believed the imaging was useful, and those who said they were happy with the results were also more likely to have highly accurate pre-operative images, as rated by the panel of surgeons.

Unfortunately, there are "absolutely" doctors who use the imaging to market nose jobs, Frankel said, by promising patients a result that isn't physically possible.

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It's also important that the surgeons themselves - not another staffer -- manipulate the image, he added, since surgeons can examine the patient and determine what kinds of changes are feasible.

Frankel added that he doesn't use computer imaging in patients receiving face lifts or eyelid lifts, however, since those two-dimensional changes can be visualized without manipulated photographs, Frankel said.

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