

# DERMATOLOGIC SURGERY

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## Who Is Still Using Lip Implants?

### Letter to the Editor:

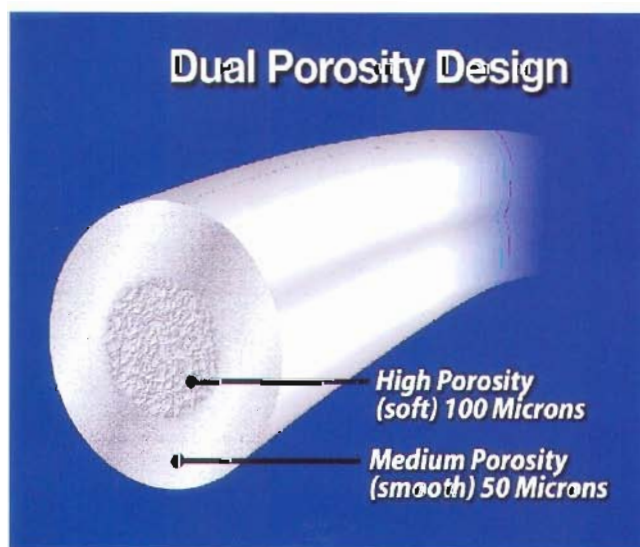
I am specifically writing about the article by Sue Ellen Cox entitled "Who Is Still Using Expanded Polytetrafluoroethylene?"<sup>1</sup> Dr. Cox is a friend and a very well respected author and clinician, and her article is appreciated but needs some clarification.

The basis of this article is that many physicians are not satisfied with the results of ePTFE lip implants. This information was garnered from two surveys and although the results cannot be ignored, I believe that the Advanta implants (formerly sold by Atrium Medical, Hudson, NH, and now being sold by Oceanbreeze Surgical Supply, Amherst, NY) need a second look.

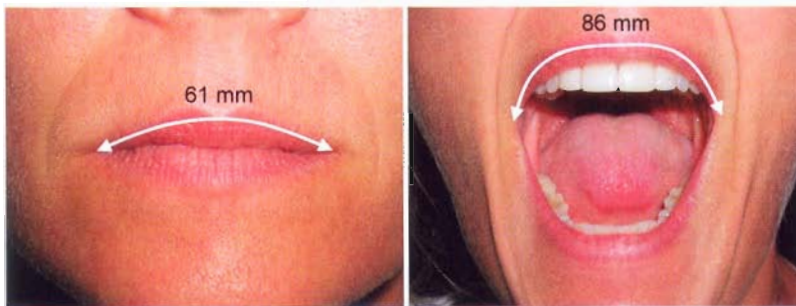
I fully agree that the results of previously placed lip implants (including Gore-Tex, Soft Form, and Ultra Soft) often provided disappointing results. Initially they seemed to occupy a niche in the armamentarium of the cosmetic surgeon, but they very largely failed both the doctor and the patient. My personal experience mirrored other surgeons in that these implants often became hard and palpable as well as contracted and resulted in "step off" deformities. Although I still have many in place that were inserted a decade ago, I removed enough of them to curtail this option 6 years ago.

After a 4- to 5-year hiatus from placing ePTFE in the lips, I heard about the Advanta implants and researched the product.<sup>2</sup> They are manufactured by a totally different process than its predecessors. The Advanta implants are fabricated with a dual porosity structure (Figure 1). Like the rings on a bull's eye, the inner layer is made with soft high-porosity structure of 100  $\mu\text{m}$ , and the outer layer is made of a smooth medium porosity of 50  $\mu\text{m}$ . Owing to this structural uniqueness, the implants are very smooth and flexible. They feel more like silk than ePTFE. Combining the improved manufacturing process of these implants with the technical mistakes learned from previous lip implants, I (and numerous other surgeons) have had a totally dif-

ferent clinical experience with the Advanta material than with previous ePTFE.<sup>2</sup> I have placed 71 Advanta implants in the lips of 43 patients since 2003. At 3 years my initial implants are still functioning without problems. Of these implants, I have experienced three infections that necessitated removal, and of these, two implants were replaced after the infection cleared. I also experienced several implants that were too short. This was not from contraction but rather from operator error. I used to attempt to obtain two implants (one for each lip) from a single 15-cm strand. I also was measuring the length of the implant with the patient's mouth closed. The result was an implant that in function was too short (Figure 2). By using only a single implant from each



**Figure 1.** The Advanta implant is made with a new manufacturing process that produces a dual porosity, a soft inner core and a smooth outer core. This structure is responsible for the silky feel and texture of the implant.



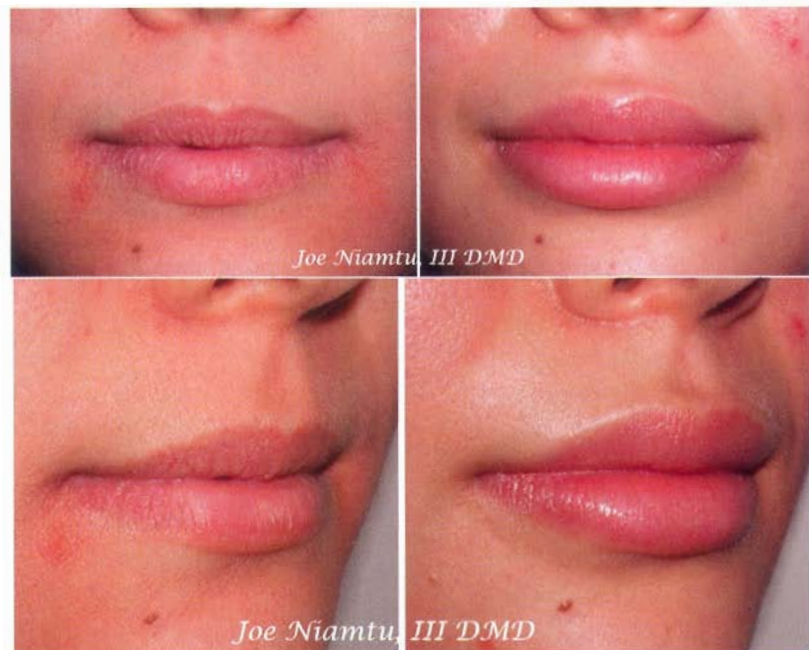
**Figure 2.** If one is measuring the lips for a proposed implant, it is important to perform the measurement with the mouth open. This patient shows a 25-mm discrepancy from the lip length in the closed and open positions.

15-cm strand and measuring with the mouth wide open, I have fixed those problems. In addition, I taper both ends of the implant to avoid significant transition in the oral commissure area. The implants also come swaged to a novel trocar that makes insertion easier and more predictable.

Dr. Cox mentions the disadvantages of a solid, permanent implant and includes “limited filling, the ability to feel the firmness of the implant, unsightly elevation of the skin over the implant, extrusion and contraction, malposition and movement of the implant.” When you stop and think about this statement, these are similar problems that are experienced with any implant, including breast, cheeks, chins, etc. In addition you can make an argument that many of these problems can also occur with fillers. For this reason, I sometimes place Advanta lip implants and touch them up with a filler for specific definition. As we have learned, multiple small procedures can add up to an excellent result not achievable by either procedure completed separately.

My total experience is over 3 years, so I don’t want to be cocky but I can tell you from experience, the previous ePTFE products produced problems well in advance of the 3-year mark. Both Dr. Cox and Dr. Goodman (commentary) make extremely valid points that just because a technology is new does not make it better. I couldn’t agree more and with the extreme push for minimally invasive pro-

cedures, the media and some doctors are putting the cart before the horse. We are doomed to see a lot of the “latest procedures” fail and the reputations and credibility of some physicians will be affected as well. Prudent practitioners approach new technology with caution, and I have certainly done this on my “second time around” with ePTFE lip implants. All I can say is “so far, so good” and the proof will be in the pudding. If my experience is unchanged in another 5 to 10 years I believe we can look at ePTFE lip implants as a viable option for lip enhancement and rejuvenation. My patients can certainly feel the implants (as they can feel their breast or chin implants), but they are soft and there is no perceived problem with normal oral function such as eating, speaking,



**Figures 3.** This patient has upper and lower Advanta lip implants placed 24 months previously. This augmentation enhances both volume and definition.

smiling, and kissing. I follow this cohort closely and the response has remained positive.

I congratulate Dr. Cox on her article but feel that the Advanta implants cannot yet be painted with the same brush as past implants that differed in technology,

### Reply

I thank Dr. Niamtu for responding to my article. Dr. Niamtu greatly likes the Advanta implants for the lips. I have no personal experience with the use of these implants and

design, and manufacturing. Figure 3 shows an excellent result in a very happy patient 24 months after implant placement.

### References

1. Cox SE. Who is still using expanded polytetrafluoroethylene? *Dermatol Surg* 2005;31:1613-5.

therefore cannot comment on the aesthetic results. It would be nice for Dr. Niamtu to publish his long-term results with this filler. It is unlikely that any solid implant will replace

2. Hanke CW. A new ePTFE soft tissue implant for natural-looking augmentation of lips and wrinkles. *Dermatol Surg* 2002;28:901-8.
3. Niamtu J 3rd. Advanta ePTFE implants in cosmetic facial surgery. *J Oral Maxillofac Surg* 2006;64:543-9.

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the popularity of the hyaluronic acid dermal fillers such as Restylane.

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