

# Stealing a Moment With **“The Dermguy”**

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By Jackie Summers  
Photography by Mark Jenkinson



An early entree into the World Wide Web as iVillage dermatology-expert-in-residence earned Eric F. Bernstein, MD, his nickname, “The Dermguy.” But it’s his two successful practices, vast experience with medical lasers, and exuberant and outgoing personality that have made him one of the industry’s highest-profile spokespersons.

## The Derm Guy

The three Bernstein kids—ages 10, 13 and 14—think it's hilarious that their friends go to bed at 10 o'clock. At their house, that's when things are just getting started. "We often stay up well past midnight," admits Eric F. Bernstein, MD. "We live in a 200-year-old farmhouse with an adjacent barn housing a horse, a pony, two cats, a Great Dane and a Pointer. Technically, we have three kids, but I definitely increase my wife's workload."

While the lack of sleep would cause most people's productivity to flag, it seems to have the opposite effect on Dr. Bernstein. The distinguished practitioner, researcher, author, teacher and businessman is always in motion and continuously adding to his already substantial list of accomplishments. And if he's in motion, he's also talking—on the phone with colleagues, with patients and with his staff. "I don't shut up," he admits. "It's my nature to want to speak. I learned in business school that the one who speaks the least in a negotiation does the best—that's never me!"

### A Passion for Lasers

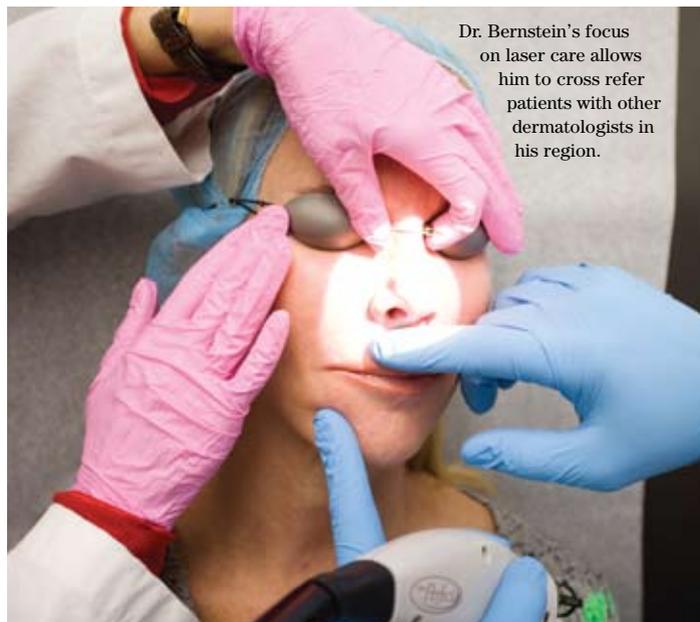
One of Dr. Bernstein's favorite topics of conversation is lasers, and it's a subject on which he has knowledge to spare, having been immersed in the field for more than 15 years. After earning his undergraduate degree at Duke University and his medical degree at Yale, Dr. Bernstein completed his internship at St. Vincent's Medical Center in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

He then served as Medical Staff Fellow at the National Institutes of Health National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, Maryland. In 1992, after a residency and stint as an instructor at Drexel University's division of dermatology, he became associate professor and director of laser surgery and cosmetic dermatology at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia. In 1998, he shifted into private practice, establishing the Laser Surgery and Cosmetic Dermatology Centers, in Marlton, New Jersey and Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, and a research laboratory to pursue molecular models of skin aging. Today his practice has evolved into the Mainline Center for Laser Surgery ([www.dermguy.com](http://www.dermguy.com)) where he offers nothing but laser treatments and where—despite the downturn in the economy—he's never been busier.

"I'm passionate about lasers," he explains. "They're all I want to do clinically. So I pursue my passion." Focusing on this niche has paid off as many of the physicians in his area have abandoned this aspect of their practices. "I do very little Botox and I

don't do fillers," he says. "So a lot of doctors refer their patients to me for laser treatments because they don't see me as competition. And lasers suit me. I love light. I love physics. It's like playing with really sophisticated video games, but people pay you to do it!"

There are other reasons for his current success, Dr. Bernstein believes, in an economy that is presenting unprecedented challenges. "Patients are opting for less invasive procedures and for cost-effective alternatives to surgery," he says. "They're also taking the time to do their homework and to look for a doctor with experience. They find me because I have a strong presence on the Web and in the local physician and patient community."



Dr. Bernstein's focus on laser care allows him to cross refer patients with other dermatologists in his region.

### An Entrepreneurial Spirit

The web presence he's referring to is another facet of his passion for lasers. Not only does Dr. Bernstein love lasers, he loves the *business* of lasers. That's what led him to partner with a pair of technology pros to launch the *Hair Removal Journal* ([hairremovaljournal.org](http://hairremovaljournal.org)), an online startup that provides patients with information on laser procedures and referrals for physicians. Thanks to its strategic content, the online publication is already No. 1 in most laser hair removal Google searches. The site generates revenue from ad-

vertising and with a pay-per-call business model. "I love it," says Dr. Bernstein. "These guys brought me kicking and screaming into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and now I spend two to three hours a day working on the business."

His interest in business also prompted him to earn an MSE in Management of Technology, a program offered by the University of Pennsylvania School of Engineering and Applied Science, co-sponsored by the Wharton School of Business. The program dovetailed perfectly with his interest in engineering—Dr. Bernstein holds a number of patents, with more patents pending, for dermatological devices, and antiaging and pharmaceutical compounds. "I have a lab where I do my research," he reveals. "It's an expensive hobby, but it meshes with my daily responsibilities in the clinic and translates into the teaching that I do." Today, Dr. Bernstein is back at the university as an instructor, teaching a class on medical devices for the Masters of Technology Management Program (EMTM).



Dr. Bernstein's staff consists of two registered nurses, an office manager; a front desk manager; two front desk employees; two nurses' assistants and two medical estheticians.

### A 'Know Thyself' Management Style

Rather than expanding his management responsibilities, earning a master's degree in management led Dr. Bernstein to better recognize some of his own limits and natural inclinations. For example, he discovered that certain members of his staff did a much better job at managing the practice—and managing him—than he ever could. “As an academic,” he explains, “sometimes it's important to remove yourself from discussions about cost. So my staff takes me out of some of those loops; they keep me out of the things I'm not good at.”

Currently his staff consists of two registered nurses, who perform about 90% of the laser hair removal treatments; an office manager; a front desk manager; two front desk employees; two nurses' assistants and two medical estheticians. This structure, he says, gives him time to see patients three to four days a week, conduct research, write articles, teach, travel and lecture. He also keeps to a daily schedule dictated by the natural rhythm of both his patients and his own preferred style: he sees patients from about 9:00am to 1:00pm (“I don't want to be lasering at 8:00 am,” he says. “I'm not a morning guy.”) and then appointments seem to taper off. So he rides his bike or hits the gym for a few hours, then returns to the office to see patients until about 6:00pm or 7:00pm. “Most of the members of my staff have been with me for a long time,” he comments. “They are great at triaging patients, so when the patients get to me, they're ready to be treated.”

His patient base is diverse, he notes, because the center offers a full range of laser treatments from hair removal and skin aging strategies to tattoo removal. The only thing his patients all have in common, he jokes, is that they are “nice people” who have the time to accommodate his exuberance. “I get energy from being with other people,” he admits. “I'm happiest in a crowd.”

Dr. Bernstein's outgoing personality has yielded another, unplanned benefit. Early in his career, some of his research prompted calls from journalists to discuss his findings. Connections were made, and he soon became a fixture in report-

ers' Rolodexes (and now, BlackBerries.) Today, Dr. Bernstein's website features video clips of his appearances on local and national news programs, plus excerpts from interviews that have appeared in publications like *Women's Wear Daily*, *Allure*, *Glamour* and *The Wall Street Journal*. He also served as the resident dermatology expert, referred to as “The DermGuy,” for iVillage. “I had one day of media training,” Dr. Bernstein recalls, “and I learned that you never look as nervous as you feel. Now it's fun. You get out there and meet new people—it's a totally different world!”

Another outlet for Dr. Bernstein's social inclination is the lecture circuit—he is in high demand as a speaker at professional conferences. He often travels with his family and family friends who also happen to be colleagues, including Dr. Suzanne Kilmer of the Laser and Skin Surgery Center of Northern California and Dr. Brian Zelickson of Zel Skin and Laser Specialists in Minneapolis. One of his current lecture topics is, “Avoiding Complications,” which, he says, reflects his conservative nature as a practitioner. “I tell patients to find someone experienced, and then ask about their style of treatment. They should decide whether they want a doctor who is aggressive or conservative. Personally I think you can always do more, but you can't go back; I think it prevents disasters.”

### An Eye on the Future

Moving forward, there are changes in the works for Dr. Bernstein's practice. He plans to consolidate his two offices into a single, larger facility. He recently closed his satellite office in New Jersey, and after the busy, pre-summer period that he typically experiences, he will leave his 2,500 square foot space in Bryn Mawr for a 3,600 square foot office nearby. It's a more upscale location, he notes, and it will reduce overhead costs considerably. “When I started my practice, I opened my offices in growing communities,” he says. “But recently I realized that I was doing a lot of commuting and, even though I was becoming brilliant and well-read from listening to all of those books on tape in the car, I wasn't having as much

## The Derm Guy

fun as I could have and I wasn't using my time well. Not to mention, I was aging my skin from all of that sun exposure through the windshield." Now, he says, he will have more room to work in the new office, and he plans to add a retail component to his practice with the goal of providing "something of value for my patients." Most important, he says, he will not have to equip two offices with all of the lasers he likes to use. He estimates that he works with 18 to 20 different devices citing the Candela VBeam Perfecta as the practice's workhorse.

Dr. Bernstein is also excited about several new devices about to hit the market, particularly in the area of fat and cellulite treatment. These devices were designed to target specific areas without affecting surrounding tissue, which eliminates scarring and allows practitioners to gently remodel the body. He cites new approaches using cold laser, radiofrequency and ultrasound, all of which, he believes, have the potential to be highly effective. The other big news on the horizon, according to Dr. Bernstein, is the development of lasers for home use. He is currently working with Tria Beauty on a home hair removal laser, which, he believes, will actually build "buzz" for medical laser treatments rather than keep potential patients out of physician's offices.



"We are currently treating less than 1% of potential laser hair removal patients," he points out. Besides, he notes, DIY has never been, and never will be, for everyone. "You can give me the best lawn mower on the planet," he laughs, "but I'm still not going to mow my own lawn!"

Once he's settled into his new offices Dr. Bernstein hopes to turn his attention to some of his patents, developing them further and hopefully bringing them to market. But first, he says, he is committed to reigning in some of his freewheeling tendencies and becoming more efficient personally and within his practice. The consolidation, he knows, is the first step toward this goal. "I have no choice," he says, "everyone is facing financial pressure, and it's necessary. Besides, I have a good time and I plan to continue to have a good time. Increased efficiency will free me up to do all of the things I want to do." ❏

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