



DR. FREDRIC BRANDT'S SUICIDE SPARKS FRANTIC SCRAMBLE FOR HIS CELEBRITY PATIENTS

The legendary aesthetic dermatologist hanged himself in April, as his A-list clientele (Madonna, Kelly Ripa) — and eight figure annual billing — become a hot commodity among NYC's top beauty makers, as revealed in THR's Doctors Issue.



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In April, only two weeks after famed aesthetic dermatologist **Fredric Brandt** committed suicide in the garage of his Miami home, his patients received a letter from Laser & Skin Surgery Center in midtown Manhattan, where he had established his New York office. Signed by center director **Dr. Roy Geronemus**, the note said the staff was "shocked and saddened by his sudden passing" and that it knew patients were "feeling the pain of his loss as well." It continued: "Please be advised that our physicians provide all of the services that Dr. Brandt performed."

The war over Brandt's patients was on.

He had one of the most enviable practices in New York. His intensely loyal following ("He had a database of thousands," says Geronemus) was an awe-inspiring group of socialites and celebrities including **Madonna, Kelly Ripa, Donna Karan, Calvin Klein** and

Gwyneth Paltrow. And, unlike most doctors in the arena of cosmetic dermatology, Brandt didn't even perform surgery; he focused on molding and perfecting the face with fillers that plumped and toxins that relaxed wrinkles. His artistry was so prized that patients waited hours for 15-minute visits that cost upward of \$5,000.

"He was one of the highest earners," confirmed Geronemus, a top laser specialist without quite as dazzling a following. Associates in the industry estimate that Brandt's practice (not even counting his product line) had an eight-figure annual income.

As the battle over Brandt's patients escalates, Geronemus has accused other dermatologists of poaching staff and openly lobbying clients. "The degree of solicitation — letters, cold calls — is unheard of in my career," he says. "I've confronted some of them and said there should be a more collegial approach."

Patricia Wexler, a top New York dermatologist, says she has never heard such chatter about aggressive overtures before. "There have been other doctors who have passed away, and it was nothing like this soliciting," she says. "People see a cash opportunity."

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Geronemus says that most of Brandt's patients have stayed with the 13-doctor practice, noting, "Our use of Botox has skyrocketed recently." A key to this retention is **Dr. Robert Anolik**, a protege who was trained by Brandt. "They know Fred trained me, and I treated him," says Anolik. "I feel slammed because there used to be two of us, and now there is just one, and the schedule is full."

Anolik says that, though his mentor still did an hour and a half of yoga each day, he had begun to discuss slowing down. Brandt had just turned 65, a scary age in a youth-obsessed business. "He would make jokes that, in the future, his hands would begin to shake and he would have to retire," recalls Anolik. "We had talked about what the transition would be, and he said, 'You will take care of the patients, right, Dr. A.?' "

Nonetheless, many patients who were loyal to Brandt have ventured afield to check out the competition. "A fair share of Fred's patients have come to me through my existing patients," says Park Avenue dermatologist **Howard Sobel**. "But they had become his personal friends, so he is a hard act to follow. A lot of them start telling stories about him and cry in my office. They are unique because they have been directing me, telling me exactly where to inject to follow his game plan. Some even mark up their own faces with a wax pencil so that I will follow Fred's blueprint."

Brandt's database is looking for more than a proficient injector to fill the void. "They don't just want expertise; they want a personality," says Sobel. "Fred used to sing, so I now have a Pandora station with show tunes on it."

HOLLYWOOD'S TOP DOCTORS



They Have Skin in the Game

These doctors are top choices for Brandt's former patients



Dr. Howard Sobel



Dr. Robert Anolik



Dr. Paul Frank



Dr. Judith Hellman



Dr. Patricia Wexler



Dr. David Colbert



Dr. Kenneth Mark

Likewise, **Dr. Judith Hellman** says her outgoing personality is helping to win some of Brandt's former patients. "He was a people person, and so am I," she says. "I used to be a musician, so everything is a little bit of a stage, and my patients are my audience. I told a patient about my own insecurities, and she said, 'Oh, that's exactly what Dr. Brandt would do.'" Both Sobel and **Dr. Paul Jarrod Frank** hired nurses who had worked for Brandt. "About 150 to 200 of Fred's patients have come to see me, and one of the most difficult things is dealing with them emotionally," says Frank, who is rumored to recently have treated Madonna. "They are very high-profile and take a lot of care and time. Most have been with him for years — he treated them like family, and he died in such an unfortunate and tragic way. Having two of his staff made the transition easier for some of them."

Despite Geronemus' claims, Frank and Sobel say they never would poach employees. "You can't steal staff," says Frank. "I got a phone call from one of the nurses, saying, 'I don't want to work in this office, now that Fred is not here.'"

Going further, Frank says that Brandt's former patients are too savvy to be swayed by all the lobbying. "Yes, doctors are aggressively courting out there, but these are sophisticated patients," he maintains. "Sure, it's an opportunity, but people who come in and spend thousands a visit are getting me because other patients are happy — they are not getting me off a Yelp review."

Brandt's patients largely agree. "Right now, it's like dominoes — one person goes to someone they like and they all go, but nobody will ever fill Fred's shoes," says Carol Brodie, who sells jewelry on the Home Shopping Network. "We all loved Fred and had a close relationship with him emotionally and aesthetically." Brodie had a melanoma on her face, and though years ago Dr. David Colbert (another cosmetic dermatologist with an illustrious following that includes **Mick Jagger** and **Naomi Watts**) detected it and Brandt seemed to have missed it, she still practically worshipped Brandt. "He held my hand through the whole procedure," recalls Brodie. "I had a piece of skin taken out of my face that was an inch in diameter, and Dr. Brandt re-created my cheek with filler. It was not just about being young. I'm on TV, and it was about giving me back what God gave me."

Brodie searched for a new doctor to maintain her appearance. "I went to one, and I wasn't happy with the result," she recalls. "I had two or three doctors call and say, 'I will take care of you.' They called my friends, too. You want to believe nothing is about business, but it is. One friend told me about Dr. Frank and said, 'He's got the touch.' I can't believe I am saying this, but I really am happy. I never thought after Fred's passing that anyone would be able to do it."

Aviva Drescher, formerly of *The Real Housewives of New York City*, also shopped around and eventually found a new doctor. "I feel, professionally, like Dr. Brandt was in a league of his own, an artist with a needle," she says. "My husband said there was a big difference with him, and he had no problem paying those huge bills. Dr. Brandt was sensitive and fragile; now I'm despondent, and I feel like I've lost a friend. It was hard to move on, but I'm finally happy with [New York dermatologist] **Dr. Kenneth Mark**, who has a great eye. I felt for a long time like I didn't want anybody to touch my face because then I would lose the last of Dr. Brandt."