

Profile: Dr Jo-Ann See

“The skill is recognising the right treatment for each patient.”



Dr Jo-Ann See is a passionate Sydneysider of Chinese heritage whose family came to Australia in the 1850s Gold Rush. A serious student, but nevertheless a normal teenager, she enjoyed weekends hanging out with friends, going to the beach, shopping and reading. Dr See's passion for medicine developed as she observed doctors and her mother, a nurse, care for her sick father.

“My father had a long illness. As I used to go to the hospital every day after school, I observed how fabulous the doctors were who looked after him. As a dermatologist, I like the luxury of being a specialist and being able to concentrate on one area of medicine. I also especially delight in the generational relationships built with patients who refer their children and in some cases their grandchildren to me,” says Dr Jo-Ann See.

“I am analytical, trustworthy and straight forward- you know where you stand with me, but this does not mean I lack sincerity or empathy. Having now been in practice for many years, I have become more astute and better equipped to understand the individual and their particular situation; and I feel that I have a more balanced and holistic approach to their care. Often, situations arise where patients face real life challenges and I would like to feel that I comfort them. I get motivated and inspired whenever a patient says “thank you, you've changed my life” or “I feel so much better.” It's a big moment when I see how a patient's acne is cleared or skin cancer treated. For many acne patients, the return of their confidence and self-esteem is uplifting when you see their skin clear.”

Dr See consults at Central Sydney Dermatology in the heart of Sydney. She is a Fellow of the Australasian College of Dermatologists, a member of the College Public Affairs Committee and of the American Academy of Dermatologists. Dr See is also a founder of the All About Acne website which provides patient information on acne and is ranked number 1 on Google. Acne and skin care are her main areas of speciality, but she also has an interest in skin cancer, pre cancer and photodynamic treatments.

“I had the opportunity to work in America and was impressed with their cutting edge innovation and research in dermatology. I love their enthusiasm in getting projects done. I value the respect my peers give me and I have been fortunate to have many international colleagues. Back in Australia, my practice was one of the first to introduce photodynamic therapy and was involved with the first trials of the drug Aldara. I recognise that dermatology changes constantly, I keep abreast with latest

research and I am open and willing to consider new treatments. I strive to be ahead of the pack and I call my team the A-team.”

Dr See is also mother to three teenage boys. Despite her gruelling schedule, she finds time to help them with their schoolwork as well as get involved in various school functions and fundraising activities. Whatever spare time she has is spent travelling, listening to French rap or reading a good book.

“I am lucky to have an understanding husband who has his own career and does his best in supporting mine. I love my job. I always say that if I won lotto tomorrow, I would still want to be a dermatologist, but if I had to choose another profession I would have liked to be a travel writer. I am happiest when I discover new places and beautiful things- whether it’s a new country, a beautiful view or an art gallery. If I had to live in another time, I would pick Renaissance France or Italy because of the stimulating new thought in art, music and culture that we are still seeing the benefits of today.”

Focus on acne

Acne is the most common of skin diseases, affecting 85% of Australians aged 15 to 24 years old. It usually begins in adolescence, but can occur decades later. The hair follicle and its associated oil (sebaceous) gland becomes blocked and inflamed. Whiteheads, blackheads and inflamed pus-filled spots develop on the face, neck, back and chest because this is where oil glands are largest and most active.

Once you reach your mid-20s, acne often clears up by itself, especially in men. However, for some young people acne is a chronic condition that needs medical help for the physical and psychological issues acne can sometimes cause.

“Acne patients are often distressed because it’s a skin condition that is visible and they feel disfigured and ugly. Most of them have tried so many treatments that didn’t work. There is too much choice out there and patients often see a dermatologist as their last resort,” says Dr Jo-Ann See.

“I have to recognise the type of acne that the patient has, the impact it has on them, assess their lifestyle and customise a suitable management plan. You need to have lots of strings in your bow. For example, a pregnant woman or a student sitting their leaving exam will have certain needs and there may be some treatment limitations. The skill is in recognising the right treatment for each patient.”

There have been many advances in dermatology cancer treatments, biologics for psoriasis, cosmetic and acne treatments. Acne has been a much discussed subject, however more education is needed to dispel the myths surrounding acne and its treatment.

“In the world of blogging and social media, it is not only confusing, but difficult for patients to really know who the real experts are in the field of acne treatment. More research trials to draw comparisons are needed in acne. There is also a lack of quality literature available about the skin condition. People expect instant results and for their problem to be fixed yesterday, but this is not always possible.”

Fast facts

Doctor-patient relationship style: Trust and connection

Special interests: Acne and skin care

Dream holiday destination: Istanbul

Favourite movie: Something fun that takes me away from everyday life, like Shrek.