“It would be great if I could have a facial when I come in for my next massage,” a massage therapist is told. “Can you wax my legs while I am here?” a client asks while walking to the pedicure chair. Another client says to her esthetician, “Can I get a manicure after my LED therapy?” These are great opportunities for specialists who are trained and licensed in a variety of services. But many skin care and spa professionals miss these opportunities, as many of them attended school to prepare for careers in a single spa specialty such as skin care, massage, waxing or manicuring. They graduated, passed their state test, accepted a job and left school far behind.

However, many are rethinking school because of comments from their clients such as those mentioned above. Schools are hearing from more and more licensed spa professionals who are expressing interest in adding another specialty license.

by Janet McCormick
Salons started the combination trend, encouraging specialists to go for additional licenses to enable adding new services without adding employees. In that setting, the most popular combination of licenses was initially nail technology and esthetics. It was also especially popular with professionals who worked alone, in lease stations or a studio. Karen Hodges, Morning Glory Nails & Skin Therapy, Key West, FL, had been a nail technician for several years and, wishing to expand her offerings to her clients, went back to school for esthetics. This addition of service possibilities took her into a studio setting—a cozy set up where she works alone and is very busy. “Getting my second license was the best thing I ever did,” she says.

The combo trend
Then, the huge growth of the spa industry spurred a movement towards specialists combining esthetics and massage therapy. The number of professionals combining these specialties has exploded and beauty schools are adding massage curriculums to meet these requests. Among those is the International Academy, Daytona Beach, FL. “The industry is definitely ‘spa’ now, making skin care and massage the absolute and natural combination for students,” says Mez Verol, owner, International Academy, Daytona Beach, FL. “I was getting calls constantly from employers for these dual licensed professionals, and students were asking to add a massage license to their esthetic license, so I had to add massage. I wish I had done it before,” he says.

Massage schools are also expanding, adding esthetics. Florida College of Natural Health, Steiner Education Group, Pompano Beach, FL, was originally a massage school, adding esthetics at a later time. All schools are adding the other course to support their students and client employers. Sherry Parker, education director, Florida College of Natural Health in Miami, Fort Lauderdale (Pompano Beach), Orlando (Maitland) and Sarasota (Bradenton), says its large spa employers prefer multifaceted professionals, as it resolves many potential problems in their spas. “Multiple licensing is something we highly recommend to our graduates,” she says.

Spa specialists usually choose and have a passion for one specialty, then decide later that adding another is the wise thing to do. Hodges believes multiple licenses are the track to success for professionals working alone. “This is working extremely well for me. Though I had a solid book of nail clients, I wanted them to come for other services also. Now, I have many clients who maintain standing appointments with multiple services twice monthly: They book nails and pedicure one time and nails and facial two weeks later,” she says. “The multiple services substantially raise my tickets per client while lowering my average time per service.” Hodges likes the diversity the two licenses provides and believes it prevents career burnout for her.
Why add a license?

Elizabeth Nila, licensed holistic health practitioner, i.e. massage therapy, and esthetician, San Diego, CA, believes multiple licensing is the way the industry is going. “When I was looking for a position after esthetics school, many of the spas appreciated the fact that I was dual licensed.” She notes that the other estheticians who did not have both licenses were facing more challenges finding a position than she was.

Katie Armitage, vice president of operations for Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals and president/vice president of operations for Associated Skin Care Professionals agrees. “Being dual-licensed makes estheticians more employable in the spa world,” she says. “Someone who can provide all the services on the menu may be more valuable to a spa owner than an esthetician or massage therapist alone.” Millie Haynam, owner of Natural Beauty, Twinsburg, OH, says that small spas are more likely to hire multiple licensed professionals because their books are more easily and quickly filled, and it reduces the number of employees needed to fill client requests. “It solves the problem of trying to build two books at the same time,” she says.

Armitage says another strong reason for massage therapists to add an additional license is the physical demands of massage therapy. “It is well known that the massage profession has a high burnout factor, and one of the more commonly heard reasons why is that the body gives out—either through overuse or poor, injury-causing techniques,” she says. “Seeking a license in another specialty, such as skin care, brings longevity to what could otherwise be a shortened career.”

Laura Firmin, esthetician and holistic health practitioner, The Spa at Rancho Bernardo, San Diego, CA, added the second license from the opposite direction. She took esthetics first and then fell in love with massage during a massage certification course. So, she finished the hours for a holistic health practitioner—massage therapist. “It’s been a tremendous advantage to my career. The spa where I work has five of us, and all of us are both estheticians and massage therapists,” she says.

Diversity is the reason Patricia Douglas, Tranquil Daze Salon, Oxford, AL, added licenses and believes they made her a well-rounded therapist and helped build client trust. Kim Reinke of Natural Beauty Salon & Spa, Twinsburg, OH, agrees. “The longer I am with a client, the more we bond and the more I am requested, I find.”

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Value added certifications

“My clients seem to be more accepting of my recommendations now. It almost seems that clients see me as someone with more professionalism and credibility due to the addition of the esthetics license,” says Elizabeth Nila. She also mentions that clients say they prefer getting a massage and a facial without having to change rooms or even therapists. The reality is that the combined services take less time on the books, while still bringing in the same amount of income.

Some schools in states that allow relaxation massage certifications combine the esthetics license with hours for a massage technician certificate. Poway Academy, Poway, CA, expanded an esthetics curriculum, adding an option to include hours in relaxation massage therapy. Called the Esthetician/Massage Therapist Program, it is 800 clock hours, including the 600 hour esthetics requirements and a 200 hour certification course in Swedish massage, preparing students to become licensed skin care technicians and certified massage technicians in the state of California. The Massage Therapy curriculum in the course specifically trains in relaxation techniques that are important to providing massage therapy services in spas.

“When I signed up for esthetics, I was informed of the other option [massage therapy],” says Julie Roberts, student, massage technician and esthetician, San Diego, CA. “I was primarily interested in skin care but I decided the combination course would be more beneficial to my career.” She believes having both skills will give her an edge on her competition when applying for a job.

Ohio and some other states also have relaxation massage certifications. Ohio’s is for estheticians and cosmetologists, allowing them to perform this level of massage. “The certification is perfect for my small spa, as it allows us to offer packages without hiring another person who would be unhappy sitting around since we don’t focus on massage,” says Haynam.

Another popular certification many students add to their esthetics or cosmetology licenses is advanced makeup. “Cosmetology and esthetic courses provide the basics, but additional skill in makeup is important to our department in the spa,” says Charlene Diaz, general manager, Ecotique Salon and Spa, San Diego, CA. Makeup is a high retail product at Ecotique—hiring already trained estheticians is a definite benefit to the spa toward advancing the makeup department. “If two potential hires are equal, but one has an additional makeup certification, I will choose the one with the additional makeup training,” she says.

Kristina Cortez, makeup instructor, Poway Academy, Poway, CA, says an adequate certification makeup course teaches the complete range of makeup applications, the science of cosmetics and how to become a professional in the makeup industry. Many estheticians and cosmetology graduates prefer to take it immediately after their licensing courses so they are ready to go to work for a spa that does a lot of makeup.

Stepping up to advanced levels

The growth rate for noninvasive cosmetic procedures seems exponential as the media drives up awareness of these services. As a result, the target group purchasing them is placing them permanently into their lifestyle while supporting the dramatic growth of medical and clinical spas. As the trend unfolds, these spas need trained professional personnel, and one of these necessary specialists is the esthetician. They want their hired estheticians to be more prepared to work
in this setting and are calling the schools to express this need, as are the results oriented day spas. Conversely, schools are receiving calls from estheticians seeking training at this level of care. They want to work in the medical setting or in results oriented day spas, but do not feel prepared to do so.

Some states agree that estheticians are not prepared and are making regulatory changes. Virginia and Utah are now requiring an additional certification course of 600 hours, post license, before estheticians can perform specified advanced treatments, such as microdermabrasion, lymphatic drainage and peels, and the estheticians who complete this second level of training become master estheticians.

A few schools in other states are stepping up to meeting the demands for this level of training, offering additional courses even though the state does not require it. These courses are advanced in nature and approved by the states as post license courses. One of these schools is Florida College of Natural Health, Steiner Education Group, Pompano Beach, FL. Florida College’s next level above the skin care license is an Associate of Science degree in Natural Health with a concentration in Paramedical Skin Care. It involves almost 700 hours of education plus the associate’s degree core classes, and trains all appropriate advanced skills for working in the clinical setting. Poway Academy also offers a second level course, called Masters Esthetics—600 hours for a certification in the advanced level courses. Both require that the esthetician have her license prior to attending the advanced course. The esthetician graduating from these courses is prepared to work in the advanced skill setting. It is believed that other schools are going to be adding these courses due to the demand of the esthetics and medical markets.

**And sometimes three**

Many professionals are adding more than one license. Kim Reinke can perform all spa services—head to toe—on her clients because of her licenses and certification in three specialties: manicuring, skin care and relaxation massage. “I wanted to offer more to my clients,” she says. “I love being able to perform both relaxation massage and skin care. The client does also, as she experiences total relaxation.” She then added manicuring. “I was making wonderful connections with my skin care and massage clients and also wanted to take care of their hand and foot needs,” she says. “By increasing the different services I offer I can spend more time with each client.” Haynam, the owner, says, “Finding her for my small spa was the answer to my needs and her book is growing at record pace.”

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Douglas combined the massage, esthetics and nail licenses. “I wanted to add more tools to my service toolbox—the more functions, the more potential for income, and I find that massage and skin care are a large part of manicures and pedicures,” she says. “So adding the care of the nails wasn’t a stretch. I can add more face time with my clients by offering them additional services.” Her clients appreciate that she can carry out all of the treatments.

These tri-licensed professionals are trained similarly to the European beauty therapists who are taught to perform spa services, head to toe, as a requirement for their licenses. The European philosophy is that each course supports and enhances the next, providing information not acquired in taking the individual courses. These professionals agree. “I’m a better esthetician and manicurist due to having my massage instruction, and a better massage therapist due to having skin care instruction,” says Reinke.

**Going back or moving forward**

“I had been a licensed massage therapist for approximately nine years and then added an esthetic license,” says Nila. While many estheticians are returning to school, there is a growing trend of students stacking their education, adding licenses one after another as Firmin, Douglas and Reinke did. Firmin was in school for more than a year, but says it was definitely worth it. Douglas, a massage therapist, went to school full time for the massage and esthetics licenses, one after the other, then immediately went back part time for the manicuring license while working. Reinke’s first license was in esthetics, and during that course, she added the Ohio esthetics massage certification. Then, after returning to work, she immediately went back to school part time for her manicuring license.

In all reality, spa specialists usually have only one type of license in mind when first entering school. However, it seems that American spa professionals are beginning to see full body treatment capabilities, the combination of skin, manicuring and massage licenses, as their best track to success, as do the Europeans. More and more skin care and spa professionals are choosing to continue or return to school, one course at a time, taking those courses that will allow them to fully treat their clients. In doing so, these multiple licensed professionals will be more valuable to the spas as well as to their clients, enjoy versatility in their work and see more profit in their business.

**Janet McCormick** is an experienced esthetician, manicurist, former salon owner and spa director. She holds a master’s in allied health management, as well as the CIDESCO diploma. She has written more than 300 articles and shares her expertise in conferences and spa education. Owner of Spa Techniques Consulting, she can be reached at 863.273.9134 or via e-mail at janmccormk@aol.com.