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ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE PHILADELPHIA SUBURBS

R. Barrett Noone





# A Beautiful LIFE

Over the course of his distinguished career, Dr. Barrett Noone has created improvements in the lives of his patients and the field of plastic surgery

by SHARON A. SHAW  
photography by PAUL REITANO

**A lifetime of experience helps to shape each one of us.** While the mind is often sharpened by knowledge earned over time, one's beauty tends to fade with age. No one is more familiar with this dichotomy than R. Barrett Noone, M.D.

During his 39 years of practice, Dr. Noone has used his knowledge and experience to shape the field of plastic surgery while helping others improve those things about their appearance that—because of aging or other reasons—may make them unhappy. “Many people who want to change something about their appearance have been longing to do so most of their lives,” says Dr. Noone, while others tell him they want to “look better for my age.”

No matter the reasons, he believes the confidence that is gained from an improved self-image after surgery has a “halo effect” that can touch multiple areas of a patient's life, including their confidence, job performance and social life. “Patients want to look and feel better, to have greater self-confidence,” he says. Such a desire is often motivated by important life events, including meeting new peer groups, completing a family, achieving success in a career or re-entering the dating world.

The late teens can be a difficult time for self-conscious individuals. During the transition from high school to college, many shy and unhappy teens elect for rhinoplasty, also known as a nose job. “I like to see some nice 16-, 17- or 18-year old on her way to college who wants to look different,” says Dr. Noone, adding that he has seen many cases where a new appearance helps these young people open up.

Over the years he has seen the approach to this, and other surgeries, become much more conservative. “It used to look like they



## R. Barrett Noone, M.D.

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had their noses done," he says. "Conservative effects are more difficult to achieve than the aggressive ones." This is where his experience is a valuable asset. He has seen—and pioneered—improvements in techniques, safety and training in his storied career. A graduate of the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, Dr. Noone has likely made more contributions in his lifetime than any other practicing suburban plastic surgeon. "My training is very important," he says. "I have to keep up with and contribute to progress."

Dr. Noone considers one of his greatest contributions to be introducing the concept of performing breast reconstruction at the time of mastectomy. Before the late 1970s, women were required to live with the results of their surgery for six months before reconstruction—a practice Dr. Noone found potentially insulting to them. He suggested that Bryn Mawr Hospital begin performing reconstruction at the time of the mastectomy and publish a study on the results. Unsurprisingly, the women who received reconstruction at the time of their mastectomy suffered less psychological effects and had no decrease in the quality of their health compared to those who waited. His suggestion became the standard of care, and he also authored the 1991 textbook, "Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery of the Breast," used for the subject.

His thorough understanding of breast surgery has made Dr. Noone uniquely qualified to perform breast augmentation and reduction. These are popular procedures for women in their 20s and 30s, although breast reduction can take place at any age. In fact, Dr. Noone notes, 20 percent of breast reduction surgeries are performed on women who are over the age of 60 and tired of their shoulders, back and neck aching. Either surgery helps to address breasts that are out of proportion for the woman and causing either physical or emotional distress.

Breast augmentation has become a part of post-pregnancy surgery many women are choosing to have in their 30s and 40s, after the birth of their children. At this time they are choosing to have their breasts, which may be saggy after motherhood, lifted or enlarged and also have loose belly areas improved with a tummy tuck. This is also a popular procedure for those who have lost significant amounts of weight. Dr. Noone notes that body contouring is another field of plastic surgery whose advanced techniques he has not only witnessed but also helped to develop.

According to Dr. Noone, one of the greatest advancements he is proud to have been a part of is the development of liposuction. In 1982 he was chosen as a member of the committee that traveled to Paris, France, to observe, evaluate and approve the technique for use in the United States. He then brought the procedure to Philadelphia. Liposuction has forever revolutionized body contouring in plastic surgery.

"A lot has changed in my career," he says, among them the safety and quality of care. He notes that these improvements have affected all areas of medicine. "Surgery is done in a hospital or certified surgery center with safe, board-certified anesthesiologists," he says. Dr. Noone has served as chief of plastic surgery at Pennsylvania Hospital, Bryn Mawr Hospital and Lankenau Hospital, and was chair of the department of surgery at Bryn Mawr Hospital for the 10-year-period from 1991 to 2001. He remains in the active practice of plastic surgery at Main Line Health. He is also clinical professor of surgery at Penn and throughout his career has directed the residency affiliation between Penn and Main Line Health in plastic surgery.

He recommends looking for a physician who is certified by one of the boards of the American Board of Medical Specialties and operating within their field of specialty. He is on the board of directors of that organization and was a director of the American Board of Plastic Surgery from 1988 to 1994. He has served as the first Executive Director of the plastic surgery board since 1997. "Patients should not feel uncomfortable asking how many [procedures] you have done,"

he advises. "Get a recommendation from your doctor, a friend or family member who has had it and don't hesitate to get more than one opinion. I tell patients, 'Plastic surgery is a big step—life changing—and surgeons should not be selected without research.' I would worry about any doctor who discouraged a second opinion if the patient wanted it."

As past president of the American Association of Plastic Surgeons, the oldest and most prestigious organization of plastic surgeons in the world, Dr. Noone was instrumental in requiring that surgeons maintain their board certification through ongoing education and testing. This effort helped earn him the Distinguished Fellow Award from that group. He has also been chair of the board of trustees of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons and his contributions to plastic surgery were recognized in 2012 with the society's highest honor, the Special Achievement Award.

During his distinguished career Dr. Noone has seen some patients through several stages of their life and the surgeries that accompany them. "When I was a resident at Penn ... I had a college student who I did a rhinoplasty for. Thirty years later she tracked me down for addi-



Dr. Noone's confidence and unrivaled expertise make his patients more comfortable, as does the personalized attention they receive from him and his caring, experienced staff.

tional work," he says. On other occasions he has done work for several generations, including one woman who was referred by her grandmother and mother, whose surgery Dr. Noone had performed years earlier.

By their 50s and 60s these men and women are considering rejuvenating procedures such as eyelid, brow and neck surgeries and face lifts, some of which Dr. Noone helped to pioneer new techniques for. In the subsequent decades, in their 60s and 70s patients may choose to upkeep their looks with maintenance. His practice has also seen a major trend toward cosmetic injectables, such as Botox, Restylane and Juvéderm. These products offer his patients a "quick fix" with virtually no downtime and help to stave off more these more advanced surgeries.

Dr. Noone has always felt a great responsibility toward not only his field but also his individual patients. "As a cosmetic surgeon you are taking what some might not consider to be a problem and operating on someone to make them better. It requires experience; once you gain experience you become more comfortable." His confidence helps to make his patients more comfortable, too, as does the personal attention they receive from the doctor and his caring staff. He and his wife, Barbara Atkins Noone, reside in nearby Haverford and are proud of their five children—three of whom (colorectal surgeon, pediatrician and certified nurse midwife) also practice medicine—and 12 grandchildren, ensuring that his legacy will continue for many years to come. ■