



first safety

Three studies have been carried out to investigate the safety of Aquamid, a long-lasting filler that is gaining popularity in Australia. **JODI THIESSEN** reports.

While relatively new to Australia, Aquamid, a permanent filler that is being used to provide volume for the lips, cheeks, naso labial folds, depressed scars and other contour irregularities, has a safety record that spans 10 years.

A retrospective clinical trial has concluded, "the product injected has been very well tolerated. The cosmetic result was judged to be very good or good by both the investigator and the patient."

Aquamid is a polyacrylamide hydrogel that has been used successfully in the previous Soviet Union for more than 10 years. About 30,000 patients have been treated with polyacrylamide hydrogel. The retrospective study

conducted in Denmark studied 104 women who had received this product for facial correction.

Further studies are currently being carried out to investigate the safety and long-term cosmetic results of facial corrective surgery. While the study was not finalised upon ACSM going to print, so far the results have been promising. "The gel has been very well tolerated with only few adverse events (swelling, inflammation and itching) all resolving spontaneously after a few days without the need for treatment."

A third study evaluating the effects of long-term exposure of polyacrylamide hydrogel in human tissue was completed last year. This study examines breast tissue

histology following injection of the gel for breast augmentation purposes. The results show that the gel is biocompatible and induces only mild tissue foreign body reaction.

Perth cosmetic physician Dr Keturah Hoffman feels confident about the safety of Aquamid: "I think Aquamid is very safe indeed, and the long term research demonstrates very few problems and very low potential to cause problems. What problems do occur, and every product has problems, are rare, and the parent company is exceptionally helpful and supportive in enabling the treating doctor to help the patient to a speedy recovery," she says. "The gel itself has been shown to be unquestionably safe, which one would predict from its dilute and inert nature. All the usual problems that relate to dermal filling can occur with Aquamid, such as infection, bruising, pain, swelling, etc.

All these respond to the correct treatment."

In Australia, Aquamid is mostly being used for the facial area. Melbourne cosmetic surgeon Dr Simon Rosenbaum has been using it since its introduction in early 2002. "I think it's an excellent product for contour irregularities. I've done cases to build up Asian noses, cheek augmentations, depressed scarring on the chest and face and body. In facial work it's also been useful in naso labial folds and chin augmentation."

Being a permanent filler is its major advantage and can also be its disadvantage if it is not administered correctly. While the treatment shouldn't need repeating, it's important to get it right the first time. Dr Rosenbaum gives the patient a visual of what the result will look like. "Because it's permanent you have to be very certain," says Dr Rosenbaum. "So I do a preliminary treatment with saline where we pump in saline to see if the patient likes it, then we wait a few days for the saline to disappear, we take a picture on a digital camera of all the markings, then we can do the treatment with Aquamid already knowing what the result will be."

Brisbane cosmetic doctor Dr Daniel Fleming agrees: "Aquamid is good because it lasts but it's only good if the patient likes the result. If you don't like the result it can be problematic. But having said that, all the patients we've treated with it have liked the result. We haven't had a single patient that hasn't been satisfied."

The product is not technically difficult to use so practitioners can become skilled very quickly. However, Dr Fleming urges patients to consider a temporary filler in

areas like the lips first. "If people have never had a filler before they may not like the result, so seeing it first is recommended." In other areas such as the naso labial folds he suggests Aquamid can be used straight away because it has been so effective. "That's an area that's not improved by facelifts so it's been a real bonus to use Aquamid," says Dr Fleming. "It's been more effective than anything else."

One of the reasons patients like the results of Aquamid so much is because it feels like nothing has been injected at all. "I had it myself about a year ago," tells Dr Fleming. "I've been very happy with it. It just feels like there's nothing there."

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Aquamid is a soft gel with no microparticles and is well tolerated in the tissues because it is mostly water and the body doesn't react to water as foreign body. It is injected in thin strings with a fine needle. Swelling may occur for a few days but it feels immediately soft and natural under the skin.

Gold coast cosmetic doctor Dr John Flynn says its safety track record is a good one and its cosmetic results are pleasing. "It's an inert gel with no tiny particles so it offers a degree of reassurance."

In comparison to other methods of permanent dermal filling, Aquamid is proving popular with not only patients but doctors as well. Dr Flynn explains: "You can still use fat transfer but the advantage of Aquamid is its consistency." It will give the result every time and last every time. "Also if you are injecting into the cheek, with age that cheek will sag, and the Aquamid will sag with it, responding like normal skin. With fixed implants you may have a problem with contour that can become undesirable with age," explains Dr Flynn.

But what if the patient doesn't like the result or a rare complication does occur? Dr Rosenbaum has removed Aquamid before and explains: "I think Aquamid is as safe as anything else but I do ensure my patients know all the risks. In all cases of reaction it has been temporary and if you do have a reaction you will need to have it removed."

If it's put in in small threads and a reaction did occur the body would try and expel it itself. "You make a few tiny incisions and it would just come out," says Dr Rosenbaum. "I have also removed some by needle and suction."

With a successful track record of 10 years and three studies demonstrating its safety, Aquamid is being embraced and has become an important addition to the cosmetic doctor's armamentarium. **ACSM**