

Some women welcome the return of silicone implants

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Just 11 years old when the federal government banned most silicone breast implants, Melissa Blazek has no health worries about her new silicone-enhanced breasts.

"I'm willing to take a risk for beauty," said Blazek, 25, a topless dancer from Dearborn who got the implants earlier this month from Rochester Hills plastic surgeon Dr. Anthony Youn. She paid for the procedure with \$6,000 from the sale of her home. The implants replace lost breast volume after she had twins 15 months ago, she said.

The reintroduction of silicone breast implants in the United States last fall, after a 14-year commercial ban, depends on women like Blazek not being fazed by past health controversies and picking silicone over saline implants. Silicone breast augmentation costs \$5,000 to \$8,000, as much as \$1,000 to \$1,500 more than saline.

But Michigan's battered economy has slowed business for many plastic surgery procedures, and many doctors predict it will take years to overcome worries about health issues linked to silicone implants.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration says while many concerns have not been substantiated, silicone implants may need to be replaced every 10 to 15 years, can get hard or may be associated with other problems.


"Fourteen years of controversy have left their mark on the psyche of patients," said Youn, medical director of the Hills Plastic Surgery & Laser Centre in Rochester Hills.

Stock prices and sales projec-



PATRICIA BECK/Detroit Free Press

Dr. Anthony Youn examines Melissa Blazek, 25, of Dearborn at his Rochester Hills office earlier this month, after she got breast implants.

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tions soared in November when the ban was lifted.

The Mentor Corp., the larger of two U.S. implant manufacturers, both in California, announced third-quarter profits of \$75.3 million, up 19% from the same period last year. Breast implants accounted for \$65.6 million of the profits.

"We believe the market is growing in the high single-digit range," said Joshua Levine, Mentor's president and chief executive officer. The company spent \$1.1 million to reintroduce silicone to women in the United States. Mentor estimates 40% of those with saline implants eventually will swap them for silicone.

Allergan Inc. projects smaller sales increases than Mentor.

In 2005, 364,610 U.S. women underwent breast augmentation procedures — a 260% jump over 1999, according to the American

Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery in New York. The numbers suggest breast augmentation is at an all-time high, although there is no way to verify that. Statistics kept prior to 1992 were inconsistent.

Dr. Bruce Chau, a plastic surgeon at Sinai-Grace Hospital in Detroit said the best doctors are comfortable with patients reacting slowly to the reintroduction of silicone. "If people aren't really jumping" to get silicone breast implants "that's a good thing," he said.

Rebecca Wozniak, 45, of Farmington Hills went to Chau to get silicone implants before Thanksgiving. She said she is comfortable they pose no health risks, and blamed pregnancy for breast-volume loss.

"I probably had the best breasts in the whole wide world; that was my best feature," said Wozniak, director of clinical services at Sinai-Grace.

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