

Black market beauty: Unlicensed injectors in South Africa's aesthetic industry

South African beauty enthusiasts were gripped by a recent *News24* story in which a young woman was mentally and physically scarred after getting illegal lip filler. The story highlighted the unfortunate problem in the country's medical aesthetics industry: illegal injectables.

By [Dr. Judey Pretorius](#) 19 Mar 2026



Image supplied.

The news outlet reported that the injector who performed the treatment is a local influencer and self-proclaimed “doctor”.

The patient knew that something was wrong post-treatment when her lips started bruising and swelling but progressively getting worse as the day went on.

She visited a doctor, only to learn that the blood flow to her lips was completely cut off, and her case was treated as a medical emergency at a local hospital.

Unfortunately, this woman's case is not unique.

The local industry is teeming with illegal injectors and illegal injectables.



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In South Africa, only medical doctors and dentists are allowed to inject fillers and neurotoxins.

This is because only a medical practitioner knows the vascular system well enough to know where and how to inject correctly and safely.

Injecting the face with filler or a neurotoxin is not only a medical procedure that a medical practitioner should perform, but it is also an art to be mastered.

If an injector is not a registered medical doctor or dentist, or if they use a black market product, a lot can go wrong.

Injectors who do not understand the vascular system may inject into the wrong area or inject too deeply.

They might use too much product or a product that does not comply with local standards.

This may lead to lifelong scarring.

Another risk is filler migration.

This is when filler shifts from its intended spot to surrounding tissues, causing bumps, swelling or a “spilled” look.

Filler can be reversed, but again, this would need to be done by a medical professional experienced in this field.

Neurotoxins (like Botox) can unfortunately not be reversed, so if you have a botched treatment area, you will need to live with it for a few months before the effects naturally taper off.

In South Africa, medical practitioners must be registered with the HPCSA (Health Professionals Council of South Africa).

If they are not registered, they cannot legally purchase injectables.

Unregistered injectors would thus have to order their injectables from the black market.

The biggest problem with black market products is that we don't know what's in them.

There is no recourse if something goes wrong, and no guarantee that the product is safe.

Most patients don't ask their doctor about the actual product that they inject.



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Registered neurotoxins

There are only three SAHPRA-registered neurotoxins in South Africa: Botox, Dysport and Xeomin.

If a doctor is not using one of these, this is a major red flag.

The same goes for filler.

Patients should enquire about brands registered with SAHPRA (South African Health Products Regulatory Authority).

Some of the most well-known and trusted brands include Juvéderm, Restylane and Teoxane, and doctors should show patients which brand they will be using.

Before considering visiting a new clinic, patients should be advised to research online.

They should be encouraged to read as many reviews as they can find, and if anything seems untoward, step away.

However, if an injector is a registered doctor, patients may lodge a formal complaint for unprofessional conduct via the HPCSA online portal.

If a so-called “bogus” practitioner performed a procedure, they can be reported to the SAPS (South African Police Service), as practising without qualifications is a criminal offence.

Furthermore, depending on the situation, affected patients might be able to claim compensation from the individual, but that should be discussed with an attorney.

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