

# Know more, do more

Dr Maureen Allem, founder and medical director of Skin Renewal, is on a mission. To learn as much as she can, and then pass on the benefits to her patients and those around her.

Dr Maureen describes her passion for learning as “intellectual curiosity.” It’s the drive to find out about the world around her, what matters right now, and which trends and treatments are going to be impacting our health tomorrow.

This fascination with accumulating knowledge is one of the reasons Skin Renewal has been able to remain at the forefront of aesthetic medicine in South Africa – and, indeed, why Dr Maureen is regarded as the doyenne on the subject, both here and amongst her international peers.

“I have my father to thank for my intellectual curiosity,” she says, explaining that he insisted on educating each of his nine children. “He insisted that education was the way to independence.”

That’s how Dr Maureen found herself applying for a degree in medicine. It wasn’t quite what she expected, though. By third year, she was considering putting her studies on hold, a decision that was effectively made for her when she married and moved to the Free State.

A few years on, however, she was itching to return to the lecture hall. “I simply couldn’t get my head around the fact that I had given up my independence. I felt that there had to be more to life.” By that time, she had become a mother and she knew that, difficult though it would be to raise two toddlers while poring over textbooks, conducting dissections and seeing patients, she’d manage. The Dean of Medicine at Wits wasn’t quite as confident, but, says Dr Maureen, “I told him that I believed in myself, and I asked him to believe in me, too.”

Welcomed back to the university, Dr Maureen took up a post in the medical ward of her local hospital following graduation. It was hard going, she admits. “I came to long for a new chapter” – a chapter that involved a move to Johannesburg and a stint as a travelling locum, before she eventually set up a business conducting medicals for executives.

It was around this time – the early 2000s – that she first heard about Botox. The treatment was so new that she could not find a description of it in MIMS, the medical directory most doctors consult for information about new medications. Her curiosity had been piqued, though: “I was intrigued when I read that Botulinum had changed the appearance of a South African VIP by removing the look of stress that made her seem unapproachable.” Driven by her innate instinct to help people, Dr Maureen wanted to be able to offer the treatment herself. “I thought of the many ways people’s lives would improve if they just looked more friendly and relaxed.”

Thanks to her perseverance, she was ultimately able to find the distributor of Botulinum in South Africa, training to become one of the first practitioners in South Africa and train other doctors in turn. While still conducting her medicals, she slowly built the loyal base of patients who would come to support Skin Renewal as it outgrew her house and required a move to premises in Rivonia, then Parkhurst and then Fourways. “In one year, we came to own three clinics, staffed by only one doctor!”

Today, Skin Renewal employs 24 doctors, along with

240 other staff members, from nurses to therapists and support staff – 90% of whom are women. Dr Maureen says it has been her pleasure to watch her staff grow, not only into new positions, but also in confidence.

Providing opportunities for her staff and transferring her hard-earned knowledge, speaks to Dr Maureen’s drive to empower women. This is reflected in her approach to patient care, too. “The women we see are often mothers working in the upper levels of organisations. We look after them, because taking care of your health is one of the most important things you can do.” She adds that ‘taking care’ means more than simply making sure they’re looking their best. It means helping them feel their best, too, by treating the root cause of any medical problem. Dr Maureen points out that this is why she has wholeheartedly adopted the principles of integrated and functional medicine. “Conventional medicine doesn’t take into account how one medication may influence another. The reality is that our systems do not work in silos. Everything in our bodies is connected, so when we need to treat the body, we must see it as a whole. Your acne treatment protocol should also look at what’s happening within your gut, for example.”

Having committed to researching the latest innovations, weighing up which are the most effective, and then introducing them to Skin Renewal’s patient base Dr Maureen still sees her patients, and takes time to train her doctors and therapists ensuring that they remain on top of the latest global trends. “One of my patients recently asked why I would work on a Saturday! But I can honestly say that I love what I do. I love finding out more about the treatments we’re able to offer, I love helping our staff deliver them, and I love helping our patients feel their very best.” *Details: [skinrenewal.co.za](http://skinrenewal.co.za), [@skinrenewalsa](https://www.instagram.com/skinrenewalsa)*

## Dream big

Dr Maureen built her business from a small circle of patients to a flourishing aesthetic medicine empire.

Here’s her advice to other women with big dreams:

- Most important of all: believe in yourself.
- Understand that you can’t do everything. Surround yourself with experts who have knowledge in the fields where your own is lacking.
- It helps to have a partner, so that you can feed off each other’s strengths.
- Be passionate about what you do.