



extreme

As the demand for a 'Brazilian' or 'Hollywood' continues to grow, beauty therapists need to ask themselves whether the benefits of offering such wax treatments outweigh the potential risks ...

Although Brazilian waxing was first introduced to the United States some 18 years ago, it is only in more recent years that demand for this rather extreme form of hair removal has crossed the Atlantic ocean and finally filtered its way down to the average high street salon in the UK. Not surprisingly, a large number of beauty therapists and salon owners are now deliberating over whether or not they should be offering this treatment to their clients - after all, if they don't keep up with the times and offer the latest treatments, someone else will. But every therapist needs to bear in mind that professionalism is just as important as profit when considering any new treatment, particularly if it involves working in the genital area ...

What is a 'Brazilian' wax?

Many therapists use the terms 'Brazilian wax' and 'Hollywood wax' interchangeably to refer to the removal of pubic hair from the genital and anal regions. However, it is generally agreed that whereas a Hollywood wax treatment involves the removal of ALL pubic hair, a Brazilian wax treatment will leave a small heart, oblong, or other desired shape, fashioned from the 'triangle' of hair on the mons pubis (the area of fatty tissue situated below the abdomen but above the vulva/ genital area that protects the pubic bone). Other names given to similar procedures include: the Australian bikini wax; the Vegas wax;

the Bermuda/ Californian triangle; and the 'back, crack and sack' (for male clients who also wish to have hair removed from their back). However, what all of these treatments* have in common is that they remove hair from the delicate skin surrounding the vulva (or penis and testicles) and the anus, which obviously raises a number of concerns ...

The risk of injuring the client

In order to remove hair from the genital and anal regions as effectively and painlessly as possible, the client not only has to assume a number of rather undignified positions, but will at times have to assist the therapist by holding a leg out of the way or by pulling a section of skin taught. Should the client fail to carry out any of these tasks properly at a key point during the treatment, s/he could sustain a serious injury. (Imagine if hot wax were to accidentally come into contact with the client's genitals/ reproductive organs? The health implications, not to mention the court settlement, could be enormous.) Similarly, some of the positions necessary to carry out the treatment may cause muscle strain or aggravate an existing back problem in susceptible clients.

Issues concerning hygiene

Although infections can occur as the result of any waxing treatment, the risk of infection is potentially higher when removing hair from the genital and anal

regions. Dr David Smith, Chairman of HABIA Health, Safety and Science Committee told the FHT:

"As with all waxing treatments, the skin is temporarily left in a vulnerable state where the pores are open. In effect the skin is porous. It therefore stands to reason that if the client had, for example, a urine infection or similar complaint, the problem could transfer to the treated area through the natural processes associated with going to the toilet."

This, of course, also raises the issue of whether therapists would be able to identify various contra-indications to treatment, e.g.:

- candidiasis (thrush)
- recent tears
- haemorrhoids (piles)
- pubic lice
- genital warts
- sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

[N.B. Menstruation is also considered a contra-indication, as is the week following menstruation, as the skin is more sensitive.] Obviously it is important to note that the client may not actually be aware that s/he has one of the above contra-indications - which will make matters very uncomfortable when the therapist (who is unlikely to be medically qualified) refuses to carry out the

bikini waxing

treatment, explaining that the client ought to seek medical attention. The alternative scenario is that both the client *and* the therapist are unaware that a contra-indication exists and the treatment goes ahead, leading to complications.

Allegations of assault

As hair is removed from the genital and anal regions as part of a Brazilian wax treatment, it is not inconceivable that a client may accuse the therapist of sexual assault. Remember, such allegations do not have to be true (or made by somebody of the opposite sex) in order to ruin a therapist's or salon's reputation overnight. Allegations of abuse would be further complicated if it transpires that the client was under 16 years of age at the time of the treatment, even if s/he stated otherwise.

Whilst the majority of clients requesting a Brazilian wax are female (as indeed are the therapists providing the treatments), a number of males do also seek this particular treatment. Therapists would need to feel comfortable about treating someone of the opposite sex, or be happy to turn these clients away. Equally, therapists would need to know what to do if a client became aroused, suggestive, or tried to make physical contact during the course of the treatment. (Thanks to a number of glamour magazines and adult internet sites, the act of carrying out or having a Brazilian wax treatment is now considered by many to be erotic/ sexually stimulating.)

Disgruntled staff

Salon owners wanting to add Brazilian waxing to their treatment list would need to ensure that they were not distressing their staff (employed or self-employed) by forcing them to carry out such treatments against their will. At best this could lead to a disgruntled work force; at worst, it could

result in an employment tribunal and subsequent pay out.

If those staff who *are* happy to carry out Brazilian wax treatments fail to have the utmost regard for health and safety issues (e.g. disposing of spatulas after single use), cross-contamination will be a further risk for salon owners to consider.

Lack of relevant training

In the majority of cases, therapists who hold an accredited qualification in waxing are unlikely to have received specific training in how to remove hair from the genital or anal regions. This does then beg the question, should major Awarding Bodies be offering an advanced qualification in Brazilian waxing? As far as the FHT is concerned, the answer to this question should be a resounding 'no'. Creating an advanced qualification in Brazilian waxing to satisfy public demand will in no way reduce the inherent risks of such treatments: no amount of practical skill or theoretical knowledge will protect therapists from allegations of assault or clients from cross-infection. From an ethical and moral point of view, it is also up to the major Awarding Bodies to draw the line and say 'enough is enough'. If they don't, who else will and where will the buck eventually stop in this profit-driven industry?

For every College lecturer who would be happy to teach an accredited qualification in Brazilian waxing (were one to exist), there would be literally hundreds who would dread the idea of their College adding this treatment to the curriculum. And do Colleges of FE really want genital and anal regions exposed in an environment that is now opening its doors to 14-16 year old students from local schools? In fact, do Colleges of FE want genital and anal regions exposed in an environment that opens its doors to students of ANY

age? Providing such a qualification in a College of FE is simply fraught with ethical, legal and practical problems.

A final word ...

There are no regulations or Acts of law in place stating that therapists cannot carry out Brazilian wax treatments. However, this does not mean that the procedure is necessarily safe or ethical. In such instances, it is up to professional therapists to place self-imposed limits on themselves and their actions *before* problems (and possibly court cases) arise.

It could be argued that, unlike other types of body hair (which can be removed far more safely by therapists), pubic hair serves to protect a complex and delicate area, comprising of moist skin, organs and glands. In this respect, pubic hair is not that dissimilar to eyelashes and yet it is highly unlikely that therapists would even consider removing a client's eyelashes, simply because this was the latest 'beauty' trend. Or would they? Perhaps if the price was right and someone was prepared to offer them an advanced qualification and insurance ...

**For the purposes of this article, all treatments that involve the removal of pubic hair from the genital/ anal regions are referred to as 'Brazilian' waxes/ waxing'.*

What do you think?

As always, the FHT would like to welcome Members' comments about this, or any other article, featured in *International Therapist*. Send your letters to: International Therapist, FHT, 18 Shakespeare Business Centre, Hathaway Close, Eastleigh, Hants SO50 4SR (or email: kyoung@fht.org.uk)