

Be Smart About Looking Good

The Importance of Choosing a Board-Certified Plastic Surgeon

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People seek plastic surgery for a variety of reasons: improved self-esteem, change in a perceived flaw, or to reverse the effects of aging, pregnancy or massive weight loss. But regardless of the motivation, patients all share a desire for a safe and predictable result. While many things may affect results, it is the experience, decision-making, and expertise of the surgeon that plays the biggest role in ensuring a favorable outcome. The choice of a qualified surgeon may be based on recommendations from friends, careful research and personal compatibility. Choosing a surgeon certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery, however, is an essential step to ensure the best training and credentials.

While this goal may seem simple, several things must be kept in mind. The laws in most states allow the practice of “medicine and surgery” with nothing more than a state license. In addition, laws governing the advertising of medical services are lax in most states. It is the job of the so-called “specialty boards” to check the training, credentials, and ethical behavior of their members. They also administer examinations and maintain the certification of the members in the various specialties.

The American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) is an organization that tracks data for all of the 24 approved medical specialty boards. Their mission of the ABMS is to provide assurance to the public that doctors certified by a Member Board have successfully completed an approved training program and also have undergone a thorough evaluation process that assures their ability to provide quality care in their specialty.

Even determining if a surgeon is board-certified can be difficult. Aggressive marketing, plus the dramatic increase in media attention surrounding plastic surgery, has resulted in some physicians being less than forthright with their credentials. There are organizations that incorporate the word “board” in their name, and even issue certificates under that name. Sometimes called “bogus boards,” the requirements for becoming “certi-

fied” by these organizations may be quite lax. Board “certification” of physicians—and sometimes even non-physicians—is often done in exchange for an application fee. Such boards lack educational standards and/or requirements, and many of them do not incorporate an examination process. There is no standardization of the credentialing process amongst bogus boards. Most medical organizations, insurance companies and regulatory agencies do not recognize non-ABMS boards.

Fortunately, with the advent of the Internet, there are several quick and reliable ways to check your prospective surgeon’s credentials. The ABMS tracks and accredits all 24 specialty boards and updates the membership status of its physicians.

Another organization open only to board-certified plastic surgeons is the American Society of Plastic Surgery (ASPS). This society promotes the advancement of plastic surgery and promotes patient education. The Society is open only to board-certified plastic surgeons, requires continuing medical education for its members and also upholds a set of ethical standards.

Plastic surgery should be a life-changing experience for the better. As with any big decision, good preparation and careful planning go a long way to ensure the best possible results and the safest outcome. Choosing a surgeon certified by the ABPS is an easy way to “be smart about looking good.”

ABMS can be found online at www.ABMS.org.



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