

CHOOSING A PLASTIC SURGEON

BEAUTY IS IN THE DETAILS

by **SAM M. SUKKAR, MD, FACS**

The decision to have plastic surgery is a highly personal matter. Choosing the right surgeon to perform your surgery is equally personal and important. In this time of marketing mayhem, many of the details that should inform your decision have been blurred by those who may not have the proper training... or your best interests in mind.

Did you know that it is perfectly legal throughout the United States for medical doctors in any specialty to offer plastic surgery, or open up a Medical Spa or Laser Center? This means the “cosmetic surgeon” you choose for your procedure could be a gynecologist, dermatologist, general practitioner or emergency room physician! In other words... a doctor who has received no specialized training in plastic surgery techniques. Often, the plastic surgery horror stories you see in the news were caused by woefully unskilled and unqualified doctors holding themselves out as plastic surgeons.

Of course... there are cosmetic surgeons and Medical Spas in the Houston area who may do good work. But why take the risk? You deserve peace of mind when making lasting changes to your body.

A Plastic Surgeon who is board certified by The American Board of Plastic Surgery has gone through rigorous training in both cosmetic and reconstructive surgical techniques, and is skilled at managing difficult surgical problems. The many years spent refining their surgical techniques allow plastic surgeons to develop aesthetic judgment and a graceful sense of form. They can visualize end results and have the ability, experience, and knowledge to achieve them.

Almost everyone has heard that they should look for “board certification” when seeking a qualified plastic surgeon (or any other physician for that matter). But most people don’t really understand exactly what this means or what is involved in becoming “board certified.” Even fewer people know about certification of operating facilities, who certifies them and what protection such certification offers. You can go to www.plasticsurgery.org to see if your surgeon is board-certified in plastic surgery.

Choosing the RIGHT plastic surgeon determines your results... and your safety.

But how do you sort out what really matters from the advertising hype?

YOUR “COSMETIC SURGEON” MIGHT ACTUALLY BE A GYNECOLOGIST, DERMATOLOGIST, GENERAL PRACTITIONER, OR ER PHYSICIAN

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actual patient

I believe patients need this information to make informed choices in their search for the right surgeon, surgical facility and anesthesia provider. In my practice, I have gone to great lengths to ensure the highest standard of safety for my patients. My operating room is certified by the American Association for Accreditation of Ambulatory Surgical Facilities, Inc. (AAAASF), and I only use board-certified anesthesiologists. Cutting costs in these important areas means cutting corners, and this could potentially compromise patient safety.

It is common for prospective patients considering plastic surgery to interview several surgeons before making a decision. Such comparison is a valuable process. To enable you to compare “apples” with “apples” and not “lemons,” I provide patients with a detailed checklist at their consultation. It is also on my website, DrSukkar.com. Differences in fee quotations between surgeons may actually represent major differences in your safety – both during surgery and in the recovery room. You want to be confident that, if an emergency occurs, the medical team has the skills and equipment needed. The importance of having a highly qualified medical team and a certified facility cannot be overemphasized. When a surgeon is certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery, it means that physician has met the minimum requirements necessary to practice in the field of Plastic Surgery. Ask to see your doctor’s continuing medical education list to make sure they are staying abreast of advances in the field. In addition, surgeons’ that have been awarded membership in The American Society of Aesthetic Surgeons (ASAPS) have been recognized for their specialization in cosmetic plastic surgery.

I have chosen to use only board-certified anesthesiologists for all of my general

anesthesia cases and for monitored anesthesia care. Some of my anesthesiologists are board certified in at least one other specialty, as well. I choose physicians who are in active practice at a hospital because I believe their skills will be at the highest level in the event of an emergency.

UNFORTUNATELY, THERE ARE A LOT OF “PLASTIC SURGERY IMPOSTERS” OUT THERE.

At the present time, there are few local, state or federal laws requiring office-based operating rooms to be certified. No level of sanitation, patient care, monitoring or peer review is required. Unfortunately, tragic consequences have occurred because of faulty equipment, lack of trained personnel and inadequate emergency equipment. Any physician may perform any procedure in an office-based surgery center as long as basic fire and safety codes are met. Unfortunately, just because a physician has an operating room in his office does not guarantee the facility has proper certification to perform your surgery. There will likely be requirements imposed in the future, but for now certification is purely voluntary. Ask your surgeon if he or she can do your surgery in a hospital. If not, it is likely he or she does not possess the proper credentials and is not a legitimate Plastic Surgeon.

Unfortunately, due to a lack of federal and state regulation, there are a lot of “plastic surgery imposters” out there. A lack of appropriate training, coupled with surgeries being performed in uncertified facilities has led to compromises in patient safety. If you

are considering plastic surgery, it should be performed by a board-certified Plastic Surgeon, operating in a certified surgical facility, who also has the privileges to do the same procedure in a local hospital.

Like any surgery, plastic surgery carries certain risks and must be taken seriously. Probably the single most important decision you can make as a patient is to choose a highly qualified surgeon. Find a plastic surgeon who specializes in the type of surgery you’re considering. View before and after photos of past patients. I believe PICTURES speak a Thousand Words. And of course, ask plenty of questions. Never settle for just anyone when it comes to your health and happiness—select a board certified plastic surgeon with the training and experience that will give you the highest likelihood of success.

CHECK IT OUT

Download a *Plastic Surgeon Checklist* @ DrSukkar.com

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Sam M. Sukkar, MD, FACS is a board certified plastic surgeon serving patients from his private practice in Houston, Texas. He is a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons, a Member of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, and a Member of the American Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons. In addition, he is a certified inspector of AAAASF surgical facilities. Dr. Sukkar was certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery in 2002.

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