

Will the real plastic surgeon please stand up!

BY: DR JON F HARRELL DO FACS



Although we typically expect elective cosmetic surgery to carry with it a low risk of serious complications, occasionally a significant incident may occur and it naturally prompts closer scrutiny into

the world of cosmetic surgery. Today, particularly in South Florida, there is an unfortunate abundance of unlicensed individuals, poorly trained physicians with questionable experience and corporations employing slick marketing campaigns which trivialize the fact that cosmetic surgery actually is real surgery with the real potential for complications. Add to this the fact that many patients shop for price first, assuming that anyone doing liposuction, for example, is a plastic surgeon and one has a situation where problems are much more likely to occur. Let's take a look at what you should be looking for when contemplating having a cosmetic surgery performed.

First, let me invite you to take a short pop quiz to assess your plastic surgery quotient (PQ). This will be a quick and relatively painless quiz and will require no use of complicated math equations, the periodic table or Greek literature. To keep it simple, it will be in a true or false format.

1. Plastic Surgery is a specialty recognized by the American Board of Medical Specialties.

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F

2. A Board Certified Plastic Surgeon has completed 5-7 years of post graduate surgical training and has been rigorously tested both in writing and orally by the American Board of Plastic Surgery.

T
F

3. The American Society of Plastic Surgeons is comprised of Board Certified Plastic Surgeons whose members must adhere to a strict code of ethics, must operate only in accredited surgical facilities and must maintain continuing education requirements, including patient safety courses.

T
F

4. Liposuction is considered to be a very major surgery.

T
F

5. The State of Florida allows any licensed physician of any specialty to perform liposuction (up to one gallon of fat removed) in his or her office without any Medical Board oversight as long as the procedure is performed under 'Local Anesthesia'.

T
F

Now give yourself one point for each question you answered as True and add up the score.

If you scored 5 Congratulations! You are either a very informed consumer or a Plastic Surgeon.

If you scored 3-4 You are still very informed and knowledgeable about medical training but may benefit from learning more about Plastic Surgery before seeking a consultation.

If you scored 0-2 Do not get plastic surgery until educated. At the very least, do not get any plastic surgery in a hotel, a private residence, a hair salon or a barber shop before doing much more research.

So now that you know your PQ, let's look at each question a little more carefully and see why this knowledge could be important to you if you're considering plastic surgery.

First, a Board Certified specialist has completed a prescribed course of training and has been independently tested to demonstrate knowledge of his/her specialty. Without this, it becomes more difficult to know what your surgeon's background really is. Typically, a Board Certified surgeon will have hospital privileges to perform the same procedures being done in an office based operating room. Secondly, membership in a specialty society usually requires adherence to a strict code of ethics, continuing medical education requirements and the obligation to operate only in accredited surgical facilities.

Third, liposuction is used as an example of cosmetic surgery since it is frequently advertised as an innocuous 'lunch time' procedure performed under local anesthesia. Educate yourself by 'Googling' liposuction complications to put this operation into perspective.

Lastly, neither the Osteopathic nor the Allopathic Medical Boards

of Florida determine who can or cannot perform cosmetic surgery—especially in an office environment. Neither can the Specialty Boards of Plastic Surgery, Dermatology, etc. Therefore, the patient is responsible to research the training background, experience and quality of the practitioner.

In our consumerist society, we are always looking for a 'good deal'. Low prices, discounts and 'specials' get our attention. However, put price into perspective and do not let it rule your final decision when choosing a surgeon. There are so many talented, ethical and well trained surgeons available locally that it makes little sense to trust anyone to operate on you if they don't have the appropriate training, certification or experience. Cosmetic surgical procedures are overwhelmingly life enhancing with a low risk of serious complications. The first step in obtaining the best results possible and having the lowest chance of complications is to choose your surgeon wisely.

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