

Don't Get "Botched" *Finding a Good Plastic Surgeon*



By Don J. Fontana, MD, PA

One of this year's popular TV shows depicts patients who have undergone cosmetic plastic surgery that has resulted in poor to very poor results – this is referred to as "botched" surgery. What makes this show so popular to the general public is not only the patients, but the degree to which these patients have been disfigured by incompetent "cosmetic surgeons."

It is common within the press to describe any physician who performs any type of a cosmetic procedure as a plastic surgeon. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

State medical boards that license physicians do not have governance over the type of medicine practiced within the physician's office. The state licensing boards have not taken the responsibility to protect the public from physicians who perform cosmetic surgery without appropriate training.

For example, a patient may receive Botox injections from plastic surgeons, derma-

The best references for finding a competent plastic surgeon are your family physician, your OB/GYN doctor, or the American Society of Plastic Surgeons.

tologists, family doctors, OB/GYN doctors, allergists, oral surgeons, ophthalmologists, ear, nose, throat doctors and any individual with an M.D., or an RN under the direction of an M.D.

The Internet has also contributed to misguiding the public. Any physician can create a website professing to be an authority in any surgical specialty, with appropriate marketing to attract patients.

Typically the offices of these untrained non-plastic surgeons display all sorts of certificates and diplomas. In some cases, the physician has taken a weekend course or very short training on a particular cosmetic procedure and then receives a very official looking document professing competence in performing the particular procedure.

In many instances, the manufacturers of various devices used for cosmetic procedures will sell or lease the device to any physician willing to purchase it, with or without training.

So, how should a prospective patient find a competent plastic cosmetic surgeon? The two worst sources are the phone book and the Internet. A telephone directory will

take an ad from any physician for any specialty he/she designates. The Internet can be misleading as mentioned.

The best references for finding a competent plastic surgeon are your family physician, your OB/GYN doctor, or the American Society of Plastic Surgeons. While the American Society of Plastic Surgeons references are not a guarantee that you will have a terrific result, you are assured that the physician is board certified and fully trained to perform the desired procedure.

What about traveling out of the country for cosmetic surgery? The Internet is ripe with opportunities to travel, vacation and have cosmetic surgery, all at a reduced cost. Buyer beware! Mexico and the Caribbean Islands are the most common sites for this risky surgery. The press is filled with horror stories about patients who have taken this bait.

There isn't a board certified plastic surgeon in the U.S. who has not seen or treated a "botched" patient who has had cut-rate surgery overseas. Once the patient returns to the U.S., there is no recourse against the physician who performed the surgery. Ironically, the cost of repairing a botched operation frequently exceeds the original cost.

If a patient is considering a cosmetic procedure, it is critical to research the qualifications of the "cosmetic surgeon." Not all physicians are trained equally, and your satisfaction is determined by the proper training of the treating surgeon.