

What does it mean to be Board Certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery?

As the popularity of plastic surgery has increased over the past several years, more and more providers are trying to get involved in the specialty of plastic surgery. These providers can range from spa personnel with no medical training, to physicians trained in non-plastic surgical specialties.

Unfortunately, any licensed physician can call themselves a plastic surgeon, regardless of their lack of training in the field of plastic surgery. Certainly, it is in the patient's best interest to find a caregiver that is an expert in their field.

In the world of contemporary advertising, it is relatively easy for any physician to give the impression that he or she is qualified in plastic surgery. While "Board Certification" is an important credential that any patient should seek in their physician, a provider who is "Boarded" in another specialty, but not by the **American Board of Plastic Surgery**, can easily mislead the patient. It is easy to become confused by a statement that says a physician is a "Board Certified Plastic Surgeon" when in fact he or she has been certified by a non-plastic surgery board and has had no formal training in plastic surgery.

Becoming certified by the **American Board of Plastic Surgery** is a very difficult process. It is no wonder that some providers have not or cannot achieve this goal. In order to be certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery, a physician must, among other things:

1. Be properly licensed as an MD
2. Undergo training programs in prerequisite surgery in addition to specific training in the field of plastic surgery, a total of which ranges between 5 and 10 or more years in length following medical school
3. Limit his or her practice to the field of plastic surgery
4. Undergo rigorous written examinations, as well as a multi-day oral examination which includes examination of the physician's practice
5. Practice in accordance with the strict ethical codes established by the American Board of Plastic Surgery
6. Provide evidence of ongoing continuing education in the field of plastic surgery

Aside from the misleading advertising practices listed above, some groups of physicians have created their own "Boards". One of these, American Board of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, does require training in the field of plastic surgery that is limited ONLY to the head and neck region. The majority of these physicians are originally trained in Ear, Nose, and Throat Surgery. Other Boards, such as the American Board of Cosmetic Surgery, accepts physicians that have had residency training in areas of medicine that do not even emphasize a surgical practice.

There are two important things to look for when evaluating a plastic surgeon. The first and most important is to figure out which Board has certified the doctor. A patient who finds that their doctor is certified by the **American Board of Plastic Surgery** can be assured that he or she

has undergone the proper training in plastic surgery, passed the demanding plastic surgical examination process, and continued to practice with a very high level of ethical standards. Secondly, patients should look for their provider to be a member of **The American Society of Plastic Surgery (ASPS)**, which is the largest organizational and educational society of plastic surgeons who have been certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery. All members of the **American Society of Plastic Surgery** are required to be certified by the **American Board of Plastic Surgery**. Additionally, physicians who belong to this organization have committed themselves to further interests of ongoing plastic surgery education, plastic surgery research, and patient safety in plastic surgery.

Both Dr. Hamacher and Dr. Bernsten have been certified by the **American Board of Plastic Surgery**. Both Dr. Hamacher and Dr. Bernsten are members of the **American Society of Plastic Surgery**. As with all aspects of plastic surgery, Dr. Hamacher and Dr. Bernsten encourage patients to become educated about the qualifications of their plastic surgery providers.