

Patient Safety Begins with Asking the Right Questions, Plastic Surgeon Advises

"Few patients realize that any licensed physician can call himself or herself a 'plastic' or 'cosmetic' surgeon--even if the doctor has no surgical training at all," says board-certified plastic surgeon and author Allan Parungao, MD, FACS. "That's why it's so important to ask questions about a surgeon's training and board certification before having plastic surgery."

Oak Park, Ill. ([PRWeb](#)) January 22, 2008 -- All surgery involves risk--but patients can minimize that risk by [asking the right questions](#) before they choose a surgeon. "Especially since the news about the death of rapper Kanye West's mother following plastic surgery, patients are asking doctors a lot more questions," says Allan Parungao, MD, FACS, a board-certified plastic surgeon in Oak Park, Ill.

"Today patients are asking doctors, 'Are you board-certified? Do you have a license? Are you operating out of an accredited facility?' These are essential questions that patients weren't asking a few years ago.

"I think this has to do with awareness," says Dr. Parungao, author of [A Woman's Guide to Cosmetic Breast Surgery and Body Contouring](#) (Addicus Books, 2006). "When someone in the news has a problem and their plastic surgeon isn't board-certified, patients start to dig deeper before choosing a plastic surgeon."

But it's not enough to ask whether a surgeon is board-certified. "Some plastic surgeons who claim to be board-certified may indeed be--but not in plastic surgery," Dr. Parungao explains. "A doctor might, for example, be board-certified in dermatology or obstetrics and gynecology."

The American Board of Plastic Surgery (ABPS) is the only board recognized by the American Board of Medical Specialties to certify U.S. surgeons in plastic surgery of the face and all areas of the body. To be board-certified by the ABPS, a physician must have graduated from an accredited medical school and completed at least five years of additional residency, usually three years of general surgery and two years of plastic surgery.

As a further safeguard for patients, the ABPS requires its member surgeons who perform surgery under anesthesia to operate in an accredited, licensed or Medicare-approved facility.

"It's also important for a surgeon to have hospital admitting privileges at a nearby medical institution in case any complications develop during or after surgery," says Dr. Parungao.

Patients considering plastic surgery now have many resources to help them ask doctors the right questions. [The American Society of Plastic Surgeons' web site](#) offers practical advice on how to choose a plastic surgeon.

Consumers can also find patient safety tips on [the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery's web site](#).

A new book by surgeon Thomas Russell, MD, executive director of the American College of Surgeons, is aimed at helping patients vet their surgeons. [I Need an Operation ... Now What? A Patient's Guide to a Safe and Successful Outcome](#) (Thomson Healthcare, 2008) includes lists of questions that patients can ask their surgeons, including their success rates, how many operations they perform in a year, and whether they have any health issues that would interfere with their ability to perform the procedure.

Dr. Parungao recommends that patients find a plastic surgeon who specializes in the procedure they are considering. "The more times a surgeon performs a procedure, the more refined his or her skills become," he

explains. "Ask the surgeon to see before and after pictures of his or her patients who have had the procedure you're interested in."

But one of the most important questions in choosing a plastic surgeon is subjective. "After verifying a plastic surgeon's credentials, patients need to ask themselves, 'Would I feel comfortable having this surgeon operate on me?'" Dr. Parungao advises. "If, after a face-to-face consultation with the surgeon, the answer is anything but a definite 'yes,' it's time to evaluate more surgeons."

For a list of 10 questions to ask when choosing a plastic surgeon, visit www.parungao.com/10questions.

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