

Red Flags to be Aware Of When Choosing A Plastic Surgeon

There are literally thousands of plastic surgeons in The United States alone. Any surgeon practicing cosmetic procedures can call themselves a "cosmetic surgeon," however, to be considered an actual plastic surgeon one must be certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery. This requires additional residency and training. There are also other board certifications that surgeons can have, such as the American Board of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, for example. Other related specialties (dermatology, otolaryngology, ophthalmology, oral surgery) also have subspecialties which focus on cosmetic procedures. They will identify themselves as "facial plastic" or "occuloplastic" surgeons. If you include all of these physicians as well, there are probably close to 60,000.

Dr. John Zannis is a board certified plastic surgeon in New Bern, North Carolina who wants to help prospective patients when selecting one from the massive number of practicing physicians.

The Following Are Some Red Flags

Offering discount coupons

Discount coupons make sense if you're looking for a haircut or a massage - but maybe not for plastic surgery. "Don't bargain price when it comes to something serious like surgery," Dr. Zannis says.

The surgeon is not board-certified

Look for someone who has become board-certified in plastic surgery by the American Board of Plastic Surgery. This means the surgeon has had at least six years of surgical training with two or three years devoted specifically to plastic surgery, has passed rigorous oral and written examinations and has demonstrated safe and ethical surgical practice.

Making lofty promises. Any surgeon that promises to make you look like a celebrity, or says he can make you look 30 years younger, is likely over-promising. A skilled surgeon knows the potential and limitations of surgery. A good surgeon will want you to look like an improved version of you, not someone else.

The surgeon's operating facility is not accredited

Often plastic surgery is performed in an ambulatory care center or the surgeon's office-based surgical facility. Either way, Dr. Zannis says you want to make sure the facility is properly accredited. Accreditation ensures that strict standards are met for proper equipment, safety, surgeon credentials and staffing.

Trying to "up-sell" patients

An initial consultation with a plastic surgeon should be a collaborative effort, in which doctor and patient come to an agreement about which course of treatment is best. Dr. Zannis says it's reasonable for the surgeon to suggest alternative approaches, but that it's worrisome if he/she uses high-pressure tactics. "Surgeons who try to convince you to have more surgery that you want may

be just trying to squeeze as much money from you as possible," warns Dr. Zannis.

Advertising heavily

Some excellent plastic surgeons advertise their services. But Dr. Zannis feels that plastic surgeons who advertise heavily - on radio, TV, in newspapers, etc. - may do so because they don't get the good word of mouth that provides a steady stream of patients. "The number of ads a surgeon displays is often inversely proportional to the quality of the doctor," Dr. Zannis says.

The short consultation:

The first visit with a plastic surgeon must be a thorough, get-to-know-you session in which both patient and doctor determine if they can work together. If you find yourself in a room viewing a video about the doctor's services and are whisked through a brief meeting, you may want to look elsewhere.

Being censured or sued

Just because a surgeon has faced a malpractice lawsuit doesn't mean he/she is incompetent. In today's medical climate, even first-rate surgeons are sometimes sued. But be wary of a surgeon who has been sued more than a few times, says Dr. Zannis. Ditto if he/she has been censured by the state medical board.

No before and after photos. If you're interested in a procedure, you should see what the physician can do for you. One of the best ways to see the quality of work is to view before and after photos of their actual patients. If they won't show you any, they may not have enough experience, or success in that particular procedure.

When to Consider a Different Cosmetic Surgeon

Searching for a cosmetic surgeon is more manageable when you use a clearly defined system to make the choice - consider all options and weigh them cautiously. If you're consulting with a cosmetic surgeon and any of the following red-flag situations occur, you might want to consider looking for a different surgeon:

During an appointment or pre-consult

The phone isn't answered promptly or is answered by a machine.

No one takes time for your call; the doctor's staff is abrupt or downright rude.

You don't receive promised information materials before your consultation.

You can't get your questions answered because the staff isn't knowledgeable or says "the doctor will tell you everything at consult."

You can't find out a ballpark fee. How can cost be a secret?

You find out you won't be meeting with the surgeon at your consult. Don't waste your time.