

(Parkland Life Column August 2009)

Tips for Finding a Surgeon for your Cosmetic Procedure

David J. Levens, MD, PA, FACS

So you've finally decided to pursue that facelift or tummy tuck or breast augmentation you've been thinking about. Now what?

Research is a smart first step. Plastic surgeons (certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery) are the only surgeons certified through the American Board of Medical Specialties to perform the full, spectrum of facial and body cosmetic procedures. Otolaryngologists (Facial Plastic Surgeons) are similarly certified to perform these procedures limited to the face. Two comprehensive online sources for information on cosmetic surgery procedures and treatments with before/after photos and videos are plasticsurgery.org (American Society of Plastic Surgeons -ASPS), and surgery.org (American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery--ASAPS). Both often carry objective critiques of the "latest", perhaps unproven procedures and techniques you might see advertised, which can be helpful for making an informed decision.

Friends who've had plastic surgery are also good sources. Clearly a positive overall experience and result reported by a friend can be the best testimonial. Ask about the quality of care provided by the surgeon's support staff during the recovery period and follow-up visits.

Before scheduling a surgical consultation, determine if the doctor is certified through the American Board of Medical Specialties (abms.org). Find out if and where the doctor has hospital privileges. Hospitals evaluate a physician's training and competency before granting privileges. If your procedure will be done in a non-hospital surgical facility, check to see if it is accredited by a recognized accrediting body, Medicare-certified, and/or state licensed. Online resources include jcaho.com, aaahc.org and aaaasf.org.

Once you've verified these credential issues, the next step is a personal consultation. It's a good idea to consult with more than one surgeon as opinions and approaches may vary. Many do not charge for an initial consultation. During the consultation, ask how often the doctor performs the procedure you are considering. Ask to see before/after photos. Bring your complete medical history to the consultation, including previous surgeries, past and current medications, allergies, family medical history and any other factors which might influence how you are likely to respond during surgery.

Ask for a complete cost breakdown, including surgeon fees, anesthesia, facility fees and any other services that might be involved. These might include a pre-op physical and blood work, medications, surgical garments and private-duty nursing. Post-surgical care should be included in the procedure fee. Occasionally, revision surgery is performed after later to improve results. Ask what the pricing policy is for revisions.

You should receive a full explanation of all possible risks, consequences, benefits and alternatives during your consultation. There are general surgical risks associated any procedures and then risks particular to a certain procedure. Ask what the recovery process typically entails, including discomfort, expected post-op recovery time period, and activity restrictions.

Once you are satisfied that the surgeons you are considering meet the criteria discussed here, let personal intuition play a role in your final decision.

David J. Levens, MD, PA, FACS is a graduate of Columbia U.- College of Physicians and Surgeons, a Board-certified Plastic Surgeon, and former Chief of Surgery at Coral Springs Medical Center. He has recently been voted best Cosmetic Surgeon in Coral Springs and Parkland for the 3rd consecutive year, and is celebrating 20 years of practice in Coral Springs, He can be reached at 954-752-1020 or www.drlevens.com.