

Who Are These People?

by Schuyler C. Metlis M.D., F.A.C.S.

I recently received a postcard announcing the opening of yet another new facility to provide me with all the latest technology to rejuvenate my aging body. The first question that came to my mind was, "what are the qualifications of the people offering these miraculous services?"

Florida law requires any advertisement for medical services to include the name of the medical practitioner. So I headed for the Internet to get the answer to my question. It's simple. Look the person up on the Florida Department of Health website. Just open your Internet browser, type in <http://www.doh.state.fl.us/> look on the right side of the page, and click on "Practitioner Profiling." Use the "Profile Search System" and everything is right there. It's amazing what you can learn.

Try looking me up. You can find out where I received my medical education and training. You can find out that I am board certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery. You can find out that I carry malpractice insurance. You can find out that I have not had any paid liability (malpractice) claims greater than \$100,000. in the last 10 years. (Actually I have never had any, period.) These are not just idle claims that I am making. The Department of Health reviews the information before it is posted.

Now look up the person who advertises that he/she is offering the cosmetic services you are interested in. Are they a licensed physician? Is he/she board certified? In what specialty is the board certification? Is he/she insured? Is his/her formal residency training in a specialty where it is reasonable to expect that he/she learned how to do the types of services he/she is offering? Plastic Surgeons and Dermatologists receive formal training in care of the skin. Vascular and most General Surgeons receive training in treating veins.

That's a lot more formal education than a weekend course learning how to do something for which the physician receives payment in full up front in cash, rather than waiting for a reduced reimbursement from an insurance company.

Physicians trained in these specialties also receive formal training in how to treat problems that might occur in their respective areas. *The reality is that no cosmetic treatment is totally free of any risk of complications.* My old general surgery chief, Dr. Frank Cole Spencer, used to preach that you should not perform an operation unless you are capable of treating the complications that might arise from that operation. Does this person have formal training in a specialty so that he/she will be able to take care of you if you have any problems?

How will you find him/her if there is a problem?

That question is especially important now that more and more insurance companies are refusing to pay for treatment of complications arising out of a cosmetic procedure. Ethical physicians recognize that they have an obligation to provide treatment if you have a complication of a cosmetic procedure that they performed. Many will provide that treatment free of charge, or at their cost.

Botox parties have been the rage in recent years. Who is injecting the Botox? If the party is in the office of, or under the auspices of a trained Plastic Surgeon or Dermatologist who has an actual office in this county, you know how to find him/her.

What about the Botox parties sponsored by your hairdresser or in a "spa?" You love your hairdresser, and it's easy to get caught up in the excitement. What doctor will be treating you? What are his/her qualifications? Does he/she have an office in the community where you can find him/her if you have a problem, like a droopy eyelid, so that he/she can take care of the problem?

Who will take care of a complication if one arises after one of these "spa" treatments? Most legitimate physicians feel that if you didn't think they were good enough to do the original treatment, they certainly aren't good enough to take care of someone else's mess.

Years ago I wrote a letter to the editor in which I said that cosmetic surgery is not a trip to the beauty parlor. The updated version of that statement is that medical treatments are not like having your hair done. Hair usually grows back. Will your skin?

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