

The Yellow Pages Plastic Surgeon

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Did I really have to go through 3 years of general surgery training and 2 years of plastic surgery training in residency programs approved by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) to become a plastic surgeon?

After recently graduating from the Grand Rapids Plastic Surgery Residency program and an aesthetic plastic surgery fellowship with Dr. Richard Ellenbogen in Los Angeles, I'm currently setting up a solo practice in Rochester Hills, Michigan. Because I've been taught that one important aspect of establishing and maintaining a busy plastic surgery practice is advertising, I contacted the local Yellow Pages in Rochester Hills to set up an ad. Although my practice will have the words "plastic surgery" in the name, it surprised me that the advertising sales representative did not require any proof that I was actually a plastic surgeon to allow me to advertise under the category "Physicians and Surgeons, M.D.–Plastic and Reconstructive." With all of the attention being paid by the media and our various professional societies to choosing a qualified plastic surgeon, this lack of background checking made an impression on me. The obvious next question then presented itself: Can a physician advertise in whatever section of the Yellow Pages that he or she wants to? Can a plastic surgeon advertise as a dermatologist, an otolaryngologist, or even a neurosurgeon? On that note, can a dermatologist or gynecologist advertise as a plastic surgeon?

Intrigued by this question, I went ahead and contacted the advertising representatives of several major Yellow Pages. All of them informed me that I could advertise in whichever subsection of "Physicians and Surgeons, M.D." that I wanted, as long as I paid for the ad.

Further intrigued, I took it one step further and reached for a local Los Angeles Yellow Pages. Under the category "Physicians and Surgeons, M.D.–Plastic and Reconstructive" there are a total of 58 listings (not counting double listings for both physician and practice name). Of these 58 listings, 35 were for plastic surgeons who are either board-certified or board-eligible by the American Board of Plastic Surgery. Twelve listings were for physicians who are certified by the American Board of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery. Five listings were for physicians who are certified by the American Board of Ophthalmology and who are members of the American Society of Ophthalmic Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery. Five physicians were certified by the American Board of Cosmetic Surgery, with backgrounds in dermatologic surgery and otolaryngology and, in one case, an unspecified osteopathic residency. The final physician was a dermatologist (Fig. 1).

With all these board certifications and professional society memberships for patients to consider, it's no wonder most people do not know the difference between these various "plastic surgeons." If the differences between these various boards are not clear to a board-eligible plastic surgeon like myself, how can we expect the public (or a Yellow Pages advertising representative) to know the difference between physicians certified by the American Board of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, the American Board of Plastic Surgery, or no board at all? With this in mind, it seemed only reasonable to attempt to create a detailed listing of the requirements of these different specialty boards so that I, and others, it is hoped, can be educated and educate our patients as well. The following list begins with the board and specialty that the vast majority of us

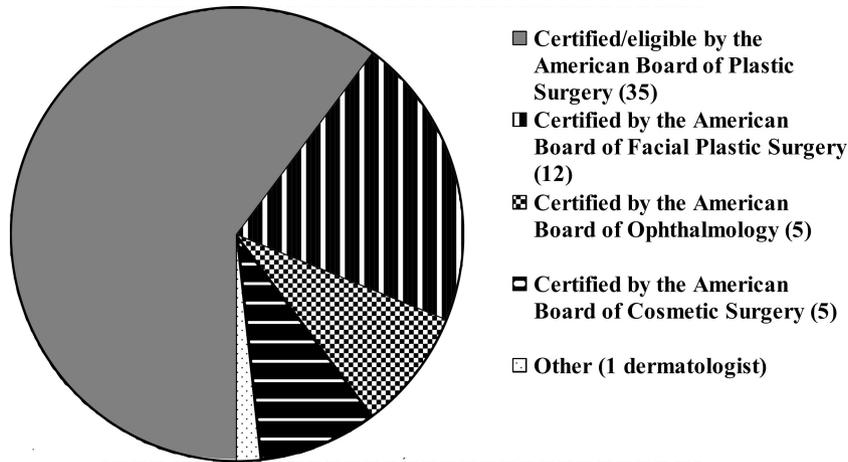


FIG. 1. Physicians listed in the Los Angeles Yellow Pages under "Physicians and Surgeons, M.D.—Plastic and Reconstructive."

are familiar with, and progresses to some boards and associations the average plastic surgeon may not know as much about.

AMERICAN BOARD OF PLASTIC SURGERY

The American Board of Plastic Surgery is one of the 24 specialty boards recognized by the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS), the main board certification organization in the United States. To be considered for board certification by the American Board of Plastic Surgery, the candidate must complete both prerequisite and requisite training in plastic and reconstructive surgery.

Prerequisite training consists of either (1) a minimum of 3 years of clinical training in general surgery in a program that is approved by the residency review committee for surgery and accredited by the ACGME or (2) completion of an accredited residency training program in neurological surgery, orthopedic surgery, otolaryngology, or urology or (3) completion of a residency program in oral and maxillofacial surgery approved by the American Dental Association, while also having graduated from a medical school which awards a Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) degree.

Requisite training in plastic surgery consists of not less than 2 years of training in a program approved by the residency review committee for plastic surgery and accredited by the ACGME. The plastic surgeon must then successfully pass comprehensive written and oral examinations.

AMERICAN BOARD OF OPHTHALMOLOGY

The American Board of Ophthalmology is another specialty board recognized by the ABMS. To be certified by this board, the physician must complete a 1-year internship approved by the ACGME followed by 3 to 4 years in an ophthalmology residency program approved by the ACGME. He or she must then pass both written and oral examinations.

An ophthalmologist specializing in ophthalmic plastic surgery cannot, by definition, be board certified in ophthalmic plastic surgery, because there is no official board of ophthalmic plastic (or oculoplastic) surgery. Instead, a board-certified ophthalmologist who practices ophthalmic plastic surgery can become a member of the American Society of Ophthalmic Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons (ASOPRS). In order for a board-certified ophthalmologist to become a member, he or she must either successfully complete an ASOPRS-sponsored 2-year fellowship in ophthalmic plastic surgery or be practicing ophthalmic plastic surgery for at least 5 years and be "distinguished in the field." The physician must then pass written and oral examinations and write an original thesis.

AMERICAN BOARD OF FACIAL PLASTIC AND RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY

The American Board of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery (ABFPRS) is not recognized by the ABMS, but to apply to the ABFPRS one must be board-certified by either the American Board of Plastic Surgery or the American Board of Otolaryngology. Applicants

can then be certified through one of two routes, the fellowship route or the experience route. Facial plastic surgery fellowships last 1 year and are followed by complete oral and written examinations and a review of the applicant's operative experience for approximately 2 years. The experience route does not require an official facial plastic surgery fellowship, but it does require at least 2 years of practice in facial plastic surgery, peer review of at least 100 operative reports in facial plastic surgery, and completion of oral and written examinations.

AMERICAN BOARD OF COSMETIC SURGERY

The American Board of Cosmetic Surgery (ABCS) divides its certification into three separate areas: general cosmetic surgery, facial cosmetic surgery, and dermatologic cosmetic surgery. All candidates for certification by the ABCS must be initially board certified by one of the following ABMS-approved specialties: plastic surgery, otolaryngology, general surgery, ophthalmology with oculoplastic surgery fellowship, oral/maxillofacial surgery with an M.D. degree, or dermatology. As of approximately 5 years ago, obstetricians and gynecologists are no longer allowed to become certified by the ABCS. After obtaining initial board certification in one of the above fields, the physician can then become certified by the ABCS by either the fellowship route or the experience route.

A physician achieving certification by the fellowship route must complete a 1- or 2-year cosmetic surgery fellowship program approved by the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery. After completion of the fellowship, the applicant must then complete a minimum of 100 cosmetic surgery procedures as primary surgeon (if in a 1-year fellowship) or 50 cosmetic surgery procedures as primary surgeon (if in a 2-year fellowship). This is followed by written and oral examinations.

A physician achieving certification by the experience route must have been in practice for at least 6 years and document at least 1000 cosmetic procedures within these last 6 years. There is also a minimum of 200 cosmetic procedures that must be performed in the year before application. The applicant must also have at least 150 CME credits in cosmetic surgery in the 3 years before application. Written

and oral examinations are also necessary for the physician achieving ABCS certification by the experience route.

So, to go back to the original question of this article, did I really have to go through all the training I did to become a plastic surgeon? Technically, I can advertise myself as a plastic surgeon without going through the official training necessary to become certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery. While there are many different organizations which a physician can go through to bill himself or herself as a "plastic surgeon," only one requires the rigorous training in the broad fields of general surgery, hand surgery, pediatric surgery, microsurgery, cosmetic surgery, and comprehensive reconstructive surgery for the entire body. When looking back at all the sleepless nights in the surgical intensive care unit, the countless evenings spent in the trauma bay computed tomography scanner, and the 2-AM free flap take-backs, I see how all of these experiences shaped me into becoming the well-rounded plastic surgeon that I am. There may be a few more gray hairs on my head, but these few grays may actually provide some added reassurance to prospective patients that the 31-year-old in front of them has sufficient experience to provide them with the highest quality care.

For more information on the various boards and organizations, visit their official Web sites listed below:

- American Board of Plastic Surgery: www.abplsurg.org
- American Board of Ophthalmology: www.abop.org
- American Society of Ophthalmic Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery: www.asoprs.org
- American Board of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery: www.abfprs.org
- American Board of Cosmetic Surgery: www.americanboardcosmeticsurgery.org

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