

what you  
need to  
know

# Surgery Nightmares

**As healthcare has changed** and reimbursement for physicians has plummeted, more and more doctors are offering cosmetic services. The reasoning is simple: The same procedure performed by a doctor today vs. 10 years ago will be met with approximately half the insurance reimbursement. Why do you think that your obstetrician/gynecologist is now offering laser vein removal, your vascular surgeon has concentrated on photofacials and your dermatologist is performing liposuction? Let's face it-plastic surgery is big business, and physicians are recouping their lost dollars on esthetics services. There is one problem, though. Are these doctors properly trained to offer and perform these services, and more importantly, how can a patient know where to go? ►

**BY ROGER BASSIN, M.D.**

## Everyone wants an 'extreme makeover'

With the recent rise in popularity of cosmetic surgery and the relative feeding frenzy that the press and media has contributed to, the demand for esthetics procedures has skyrocketed. Along with this is the alarming increase in plastic surgical complications, or "botch jobs," that plastic surgeons have witnessed. According to the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery, 2003 saw on average a 5 to 10 percent increase in all of the most popular cosmetic procedures performed in comparison to 2002. The most

popular procedures were breast augmentation, liposuction, facelift and blepharoplasty (eyelid surgery). There was also an 11 percent increase in the most popular cosmetic service, Botox. Experts state that this recent popularity can be attributable to the baby boomers reaching middle age, and for this reason, it can be safely assumed that we have not even scratched the surface on what the demand will be in the future.

Finding the correct surgeon is not always the easiest thing to do. Just open up the newspaper, turn on the TV, or tune into any of your local radio stations, and you will be bombarded with advertising campaigns targeted at bringing patients through the door. Unknowing patients often mistake these ads as a substitute for proper training. A physician does not need to hold any specific certification to launch an advertising campaign, and as such, some of the most poorly trained doctors have the busiest practices, based solely on business savvy, not quality care.



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## Look for a specialty

As technology and research in medicine have reached levels never before seen, the knowledge and intimacy associated with areas of expertise in the field of cosmetic surgery has transformed the field into a "niche" profession. Your general plastic surgeon may not be best suited to perform delicate eyelid surgery, just as your internist is not best suited to treat a specific heart condition, which is usually handled by a cardiologist. There are so many titles and board certifications that discerning between the fields has become more like solving a jigsaw puzzle.

The same patients who seek plastic surgery are, for the most part, the same patients who frequent spas, boutiques and beauty salons. These arenas of beauty can be thought of as a breeding ground for the plastic surgery clientele of today and tomorrow. As any spa technician can attest to, clients are always inquiring as to who is the latest and greatest cosmetic surgeon. Many of you are not sure where to recommend your spa guests, and hopefully some of these tips can help you steer your clients in the right direction.

### General plastic surgeons

These doctors are usually board-certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery. Doctors with this certification have trained for five years in general surgery and have spent an additional two years learning about full-body plastic surgery. These doctors are the traditional plastic surgeons who operated on every aspect of the body before the newer subspecialties arrived. I would recommend patients seeking liposuction and breast augmentation to these physicians, and those seeking facial plastic surgery only to those plastic surgeons who have concentrated a significant portion of their practice to the face.

### Facial plastic surgeons

These doctors are usually board-certified by the American Board of Facial Plastic Surgery. Doctors with this certification have completed a residency in otolaryngology (ear, nose and throat) and have spent an additional year learning about facial plastic surgery. I would recommend patients seeking a facelift to these physicians because of their intimate knowledge of the face and neck.

### Oculoplastic surgeons

These doctors are usually board-certified by the American Board of Ophthalmology. Doctors with this certification have completed a residency in ophthalmology (eye surgery) and have spent an additional two years learning about facial plastic surgery with a concentration on the eyelids. This group of physicians will soon have their own board certification, calling themselves oculofacial surgeons, to help differentiate them from their general ophthalmology colleagues. I would recommend patients seeking blepharoplasty (eyelid surgery) or cheek lifts (best performed through the inside of the lower eyelid) to these physicians, as many patients feel comfortable knowing their plastic surgeon has the benefit of three years training in general eye surgery. Many of these specialists have had extensive training in eyebrow and facelift surgery as well.

### Dermatologists

These doctors are usually board-certified by the American Board of Dermatology. Doctors (with this certification have completed a residency in dermatology. Some of these physicians spend additional time training in cosmetic dermatology. As these doctors are experts in skin care, I would recommend patients seeking laser treatment to these physicians. This includes hair removal and laser resurfacing. I am hesitant to recommend any type of surgical procedure to dermatologists, based on the absence of surgical training in their residencies.



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### A Surgery Nightmare

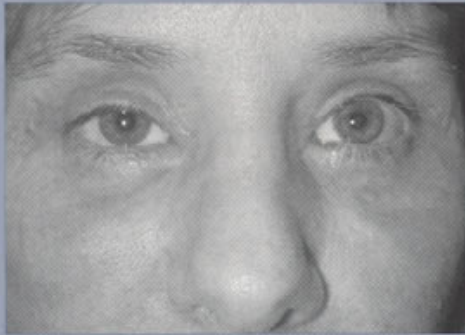


Figure 1



Figure 2

Figure 1 shows a patient who had too much upper eyelid skin removed during a blepharoplasty (cosmetic eyelid surgery). The muscle was also damaged inside the eyelid causing a droopy eyelid. The removal of too much skin, aside from giving a poor esthetic result, does not allow the patient to properly close her eyes, evidenced by Figure 2, which can lead to corneal ulcers, excessive tearing and chronically irritated eyes.

### Word-of-mouth

Having a general understanding of the doctors available to treat clients' specific needs can help to cut down on the complication rates from unqualified physicians. This is a general overview and is in no way meant to be an absolute algorithm of where patients should be referred. Some of the greatest facelift surgeons are general plastic surgeons, and some of the worst complications I have seen have come from general plastic surgeons (figures 1 and 2). There is no substitute for the word-of-mouth that helped build doctors' reputations prior to the age of advertising, and above all, for patients seeking advice from the spa technician, there is no substitute for the consistent, good results and happy clientele your local doctors are providing.

Unfortunately for many clients, poor results and complications have occurred. This growing group of frustrated patients wound up in the wrong hands and, instead of feeling and looking better, have developed medical problems, unsightly scars, nerve damage or disfigurement. Don't get me wrong-every doctor has had an occasional complication, but we all know which doctors in our communities are constantly churning out lousy outcomes. It is their patients who must be referred to specialists to alleviate the problems. In my practice, I am constantly seeing the same complications from the same doctors, and the resultant outcomes are medical conditions around the eyes, most commonly from the aggressive removal of skin. Luckily, most of these conditions can be fixed. The spa technician should be aware of those doctors in the community specializing in a particular area of expertise, as these physicians are most equipped to handle complications or "botch jobs." Spa technicians should also be aware of the doctors who are constantly causing these problems and advise their clients to seek consultations elsewhere.

With the growth in the cosmetic surgery industry, informing our customers of their best options can aid in happy spa clients and in better results from plastic surgery. Spa technicians, based on their exposure to this growing demand, can help their clients best by being informed of the right doctors to refer them to, the doctors to avoid and the physicians to see when complications arise.

**Roger Bassin, M.D.**, has devoted a significant portion of his practice to the repair of many botched surgeries commonly seen around the eyes. He has helped pioneer many of the "invisible incision" techniques. Dr. Bassin has offices in Melbourne, Florida, (321) 723-9885, and Winter Park, Florida, (407) 851-3888. Dr. Bassin also has a Web site: [www.drbassin.com](http://www.drbassin.com).

