

**To find out if your surgeon is board certified in Plastic Surgery, go to:**

<https://www.abplsurg.org/ModDefault.aspx?section=PubFind>

What your surgeon's profile means:

**"Time-limited Certification"** - surgeon was certified 1995 or after and has a certificate that is valid for ten years. Participation in the Maintenance of Certification Program is mandatory to renew certification every 10 years.

**"Lifetime Certification"** - surgeon was certified *prior to* 1995 and has a certificate that is valid indefinitely. Participation in the Maintenance of Certification Program is voluntary and if completed, is reported here as "recertified."

ABMS is recognized as the "gold standard" in physician certification. Please note certification is a voluntary credential.

## Frequently Asked Questions

Can also be found at: <https://www.abplsurg.org/ModDefault.aspx?section=Faq>

- [How does a doctor become Board Certified?](#)
- [Why is The American Board of Plastic Surgery, Inc. different from other plastic surgery \(or cosmetic surgery\) Boards?](#)
- [What is the difference between membership in a society, association, academy and accreditation/certification?](#)
- [Define licensure, certification and accreditation.](#)
- [What is the meaning of Board Certification?](#)
- [Where do I file a complaint about a plastic surgeon?](#)
- [Where can I find good information on plastic surgery procedures?](#)
- [Is Board Certification in Plastic Surgery the Best?](#)
- [How do I know if this physician has had any problems, lawsuits, complaints lodged against him/her?](#)
- [How do I choose a good Plastic Surgeon and what type of questions should I be asking my doctor?](#)
- [How do I find a Plastic Surgeon who specializes in the procedure that I am seeking to have done?](#)
- [Does that mean that an Otolaryngologist \(or Dermatologist, Ophthalmologist\) is not qualified to do plastic surgery?](#)
- [What does it mean when a doctor isn't board certified?](#)
- [What does it mean when the doctor is certified by another board and/or society or academy \(e.g. self-designated boards\)?](#)

### **Q.** How does a doctor become Board Certified?

**A.** Why should I choose a doctor who is Board Certified by ABPS?

By choosing a plastic surgeon who is certified by The American Board of Plastic Surgery, Inc., you can be assured that the doctor has graduated from an accredited medical school and has completed at least five years of additional training as a resident surgeon in a program accredited by the Accreditation Council for Medical Education or the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. This includes a minimum of five years of residency training in all areas of surgery, including at least two years devoted entirely to plastic surgery. Certification is a voluntary process a surgeon seeks after this training. To become certified, the doctor then must pass comprehensive written and oral exams.

We suggest you visit the link on our home page to American Board of Medical Specialties website ([www.abms.org](http://www.abms.org)) and click on "Is Your Doctor Board Certified" to check whether a doctor is board certified by any of the 24 ABMS Boards.

### **Q.** Why is The American Board of Plastic Surgery, Inc. different from other plastic surgery (or cosmetic surgery) Boards?

**A.** ABPS is one of the 24 specialty boards recognized by the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS). It is the only ABMS board which certifies in the full spectrum of the specialty of plastic surgery of the entire body. That is, plastic and reconstructive surgery of the head and neck, trunk and extremities.

**Q. What is the difference between membership in a society, association, academy and accreditation/certification?**

**A.** The ABPS Diplomate is a certified physician who has met the requirements outlined above. The mission of The American Board of Plastic Surgery, Inc. is to promote safe, ethical, efficacious plastic surgery to the public by maintaining high standards for the education, examination, certification and maintenance of certification of plastic surgeons as specialists and subspecialties.

Societies are professional membership associations. The specific society, association or academy should be contacted for specific membership requirements and mission.

**Q. Define licensure, certification and accreditation.**

**A.** **Licensure** is designed as minimum standard necessary to practice medicine. It is a public function, administered by the states. The standards are established through a public process and all actions taken – both in granting a license and in restricting or withdrawing a license – are matters of public record. Licensure is not specialty specific and permits an individual to provide to the public any medical or surgical service he/she desires.

**Certification** by a specialty Board attests to 1) completion of a prescribed set of education and training requirements in a specialty of medicine beyond the minimum requirements for licensure, and 2) passage of examinations that test the fund of knowledge in that specialty. All specialties now also require maintenance of certification (MOC), which requires completion of specified continuing education. Assessment of performance in practice and successful completion of a further examination testing the fund of knowledge in that specialty are also required for MOC. Many health care organizations and health plans now require certification in order to provide services in the relevant specialty area. Board-certified physicians govern specialty Boards in that specialty.

**Accreditation** is awarded to licensed physicians who have conducted their professional activities in accordance with standards set to define quality in professional practice. These standards include ethical behavior; absence of disciplinary actions by hospitals, licensing agencies, or financing programs; participation in peer review; participation in clinical self-assessment; operation of a safe, patient-centered practice that meets criteria for quality; and participation in measurement of clinical performance and patient care results, including patient satisfaction. Accreditation is not specialty specific. Detailed reports on accreditation are provided to health care organizations and health plans for their use in evaluating physicians. These reports include information on the physician's license status and specialty board certification. The American Medical Accreditation Program is governed by a 17 member Board that includes a majority of physicians, as well as representation from consumers, employers, HCFA, managed care plans, voluntary health organizations and others.

**Q. What is the Meaning of Board Certification?**

**A. I. An Overview of Certification.**

The certification process is designed to assure the public that a certified medical specialist has successfully completed an approved educational program and an evaluation, including an examination process designed to assess the knowledge, experience and skills requisite to the provision of high quality patient care in that specialty.

The American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) is the umbrella organization for 24 approved specialty certifying boards. To be certified as a specialist by one of these recognized boards, a physician must complete certain requirements. The requirements for each specialty are determined by the specialty board, but the requirements generally include:

1. Completion of a course of study leading to the M.D. or D.O. (Doctor of Osteopathy) degree from a recognized school of medicine or school of osteopathy.
2. Completion of required training in an accredited residency program designed to train specialists in the discipline.
3. Many specialty boards require assessments and documentation of individual performance from the residency training director, or from the chief of service in the hospital where the specialist has practiced.
4. All ABMS Member Boards require that a person seeking certification have an unrestricted license to practice medicine in order to take the certification examination.
5. Each candidate for certification must pass examinations given by the specialty board. Candidates who have passed the exams and other requirements are then given the status of "Diplomate" and are certified as specialists. A similar process is followed for specialists who want to become subspecialists.

**II. Time Limits on Certification**

Certification is an indication that the specialists has completed an approved medical education program and an evaluation, including an examination designed to assess the knowledge, experience and skills necessary to provide high quality care in that specialty at the time the certificate is awarded.

When the process of certification began, diplomates were awarded certificates that were not time-limited, and therefore did not have to be renewed. In recognition of the pace of change in medical knowledge, certificates awarded by the ABPS since 1995 are time-limited, and are valid for ten years. During this 10-year period, the diplomate must demonstrate maintenance of certification through a process of continuing education in the specialty, demonstration of professional credentials such as hospital privileges, review and evaluation of practice performance and further examination. Diplomates whose certificates are not time-limited are encouraged to electively participate in the MOC-PS program.

Certification indicates that the specialty board determined, based on the criteria then in effect, that the diplomate possessed the education, training, experience and knowledge required to be a specialist at the time the certificate was awarded. To give continuity to this process, the Maintenance of Certification Program (MOC-PS) is designed to assist diplomates to maintain their knowledge and skills through continuing education and documented experience during the period between examinations.

### III. The Limits of Certification

Many qualities are necessary to be a competent physician, and many of these qualities cannot be quantified or measured. Thus Board Certification is not a warranty that a physician is "competent."

Additionally, each specialty board seeks to determine whether its diplomates possess the knowledge, experience and skills necessary to act as specialists within its own specialty. Many physicians are capable of treating conditions and performing procedures that are not within the scope of the specialty in which they are certified. However, ABMS Member Boards do not make any assumptions of whether a physician has the knowledge, experience and skills needed for conditions and perform procedures that are not within the scope for the board which offers certification in the field. For a description of the types of conditions that fall within each specialty, see the "Guide to Physician Specialties" from the ABMS or visit the website of the Board in question.

For further information concerning the requirements for certification, recertification and maintenance of certification for a particular specialty, you should check with the specific ABMS Member Board or check the website of the Member Board. A link to the website of each ABMS Member Boards can be found at [www.abms.org/About\\_ABMS/member\\_boards.aspx](http://www.abms.org/About_ABMS/member_boards.aspx). If you need more information concerning the status of a physician's certification, please contact the Member Board of the physician's specialty.

#### Q. Where do I file a complaint about a plastic surgeon?

A. Health care consumers who are not satisfied with their care should first speak to the physician who performed the procedure. The medical director of the hospital where care was provided would be the next step. For significant problems, the most appropriate organization for patient complaints is the state medical licensing board in the state in which the surgeon practices. Consumers can find the contact information to send a written complaint from the list of licensing boards on the website for the Federation of State Medical Boards at [www.fsmb.org](http://www.fsmb.org).

#### Q. Where can I find good information on plastic surgery procedures?

A. Contact the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) at [www.plasticsurgery.org](http://www.plasticsurgery.org) or the American Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (ASAPS) at [www.surgery.org](http://www.surgery.org).

#### Q. Is Board Certification in Plastic Surgery the Best?

A. Board Certification status is one tool a patient can use when deciding on a surgeon. It tells the health care consumer about the training and examinations in the specialty field that a surgeon has completed. The training and testing requirements are listed in question #1. Consumers can compare the ABPS requirements for certification to those of the surgeon under consideration.

#### Q. How do I know if this physician has had any problems, lawsuits, complaints lodged against him/her?

A. The status of a physician's license can be found on the state medical licensing board website under "doctor lookup" or "license verification." Go to the Federation of State Medical Boards at [www.fsmb.org](http://www.fsmb.org) to find the link to your state medical board.

#### Q. How do I choose a good Plastic Surgeon and what type of questions should I be asking my doctor?

A. Helpful questions to ask of the prospective surgeon include:

- Is the doctor Board Certified and is that specialty area appropriate to the procedure you are considering?
- What qualifications/training does the physician have to perform the procedure in question?
- How many of this type of procedure has he/she performed?
- How many of this type of procedure does he/she perform each year?
- If you are considering a new procedure, how did the doctor obtain training for this?
- Has the doctor had many problems or complications with this procedure?
- Do you feel comfortable with that doctor?

ASPS and ASAPS have brochures available on how to choose a plastic surgeon and on many procedures which may be helpful. The websites listed above also contain good patient information on procedures.

#### Q. How do I find a Plastic Surgeon who specializes in the procedure that I am seeking to have done?

**A.** The ASPS or ASAPS websites allow you to locate a surgeon by area and by some procedures. Go to [www.plasticsurgery.org](http://www.plasticsurgery.org) or [www.surgery.org](http://www.surgery.org).

**Q.** **Does that mean that an Otolaryngologist (or Dermatologist, Ophthalmologist) is not qualified to do plastic surgery?**

**A.** Residency training programs in specialties other than plastic surgery do include some aspects of plastic surgery. For example, Otolaryngology training involves plastic surgery of the head and neck. Ophthalmology with an additional fellowship in Oculoplastic Surgery training includes procedures in and around the eyes, and Dermatology training can include laser procedures of the skin. We suggest you have a discussion with your physician about the procedure, and how his/her training has prepared him/her for the surgery you are considering.

**Q.** **What does it mean when a doctor isn't board certified?**

**A.** Board Certification is an additional voluntary credential a physician chooses to obtain after medical school and residency training. It can mean that the surgeon did not complete the requisite training requirements for ABPS, completed training outside the United States or Canada, completed surgical training in an Osteopathic program, elected not to take an examination or was unsuccessful on the examination.

**Q.** **What does it mean when the doctor is certified by another board and/or society or academy (e.g. self-designated boards)?**

**A.** ABPS requirements include the minimum of five years of surgical training outlined above. We recommend consumers contact the Board in question and compare the training and testing requirements of the other board to those of APBS in order to make an informed decision.

# The American Board of Plastic Surgery, Inc.®

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January 8, 2010

Board ID #: 109772

Christopher Mead Nichols, M.D.  
 3015 N. 30th Street  
 Tacoma, WA 98407

Dear Dr. Nichols:

**Congratulations!** The American Board of Plastic Surgery, Inc. takes pleasure in informing you that you have successfully completed the November 12, 13, 14, 2009 Oral Examination in Phoenix, Arizona. You are now a Diplomate of the Board. Enclosed is your Performance Report provided by Measurement Research Associates.

You can expect to receive your certificate, attesting to your Diplomate status with The American Board of Plastic Surgery, Inc., in approximately four months. Your certificate will be imprinted with your name, certificate number, date of issue and expiration date. Your certificate number will not be the same as your Board ID number.

Since 1995, certificates issued by the Board are dated and valid for 10 years. Revalidation requires successful completion of all steps in the Board's Maintenance of Certification (MOC-PS) Program. Details about the program may be obtained on the Board's website at [www.abplsurg.org](http://www.abplsurg.org). Your first requirement for completion of Part I and Part II will be due in 2012. For your convenience, an MOC-PS brochure is enclosed.

The Board Office will submit your name, address, (social security number and date of birth for ID reference not publication) to the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS). If you do not wish the Board to submit this information to ABMS, please notify the Board Office in writing no later than January 29, 2010. ABMS will contact you directly for inclusion in their next Directory. The Board will also notify the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, Inc. (ASPS), regional Plastic Surgery Societies and the American College of Surgeons (ACS) of your certification. In addition, a copy of your Performance Report will be sent to the program director of your residency.

It is important that you continue to keep the Board informed of your current mailing address and e-mail address. Please notify us of any future address and e-mail changes by logging in to your Physician Profile on the Board's website.

Best wishes for continued success.

Sincerely yours,

R. Barrett Noone, M.D.  
 Executive Director  
 RBN/mmr

Enclosure: Performance Report and MOC-PS brochure