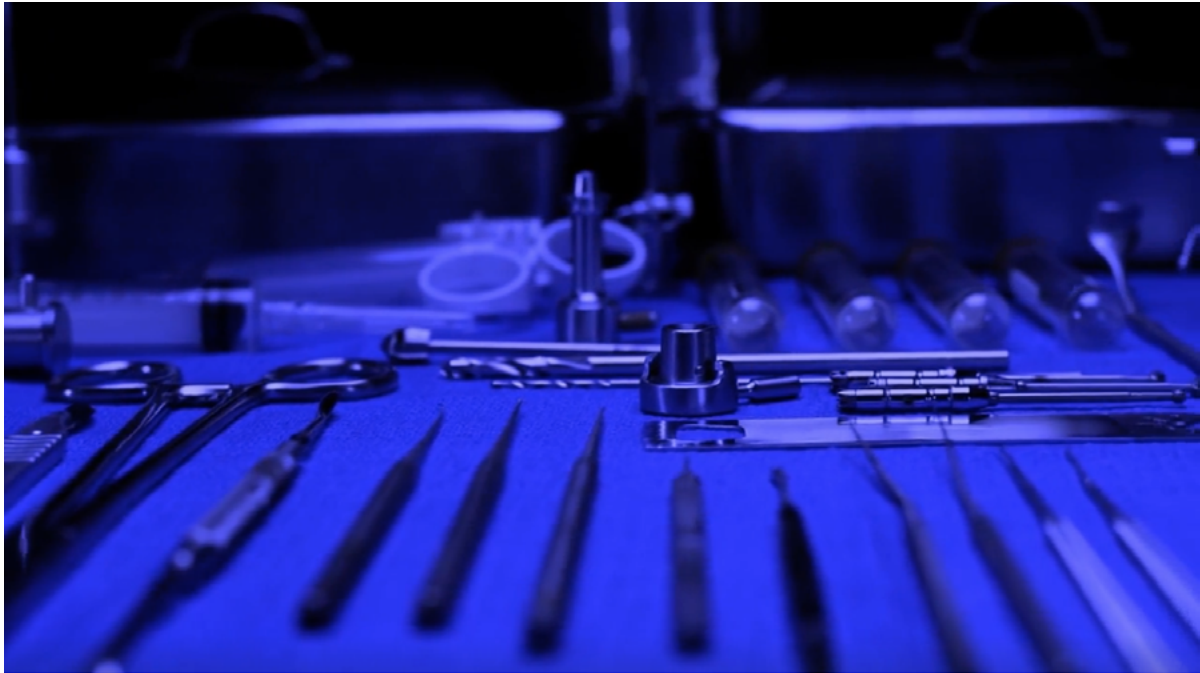


## Here's how experts say you can vet your plastic surgeon

Taylor Stevens | August 28, 2024



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SALT LAKE CITY — As plastic surgery spikes in popularity — and as more physicians without board certification and specialized training pivot to these procedures — experts are urging Utahns to be wary when picking a provider.

Too many people, they say, rely on a cursory Google search when deciding who to trust with a procedure. And as cosmetic surgeries have become increasingly normalized, potential patients may not think enough about the long-term ramifications of going under the knife.

“With everything these days, we have to be more thoughtful and do our research and not just depend on quick internet searches,” said Susan Madsen, the director of the Utah Women & Leadership Project at Utah State University, who has researched plastic surgery in the state.

So what should prospective patients be looking for?

Most importantly, experts recommend they find a doctor who’s been board-certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery — a stamp of approval that comes with a minimum of three years’ training in the field.

Board-certified plastic surgeons also agree to complete continuing education requirements, follow the board’s code of ethics and have admitting privileges at a local hospital in case something goes wrong.

Patients can check to see whether their doctor is certified at the American Board of Plastic Surgery's website.

Mark Steinagel, the director of the Utah Division of Professional Licensing (DOPL), noted that board certification is not required "to perform any medical procedure, but competency is required."

That means providers trained as gynecologists, general surgeons or family practitioners could perform cosmetic surgeries in Utah — so long as they had some form of general surgery or plastic surgery rotation in their training, according to the division.

FOX 13 News recently identified 27 medical malpractice complaints filed in Utah since 2020 against 18 providers who perform plastic or cosmetic surgery. Of those being sued, a third are not board-certified in plastic surgery, the review found.

**Dr. Steven Williams**, president of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, said providers who aren't board-certified to do plastic surgery sometimes refer to themselves as "cosmetic surgeons" or use other vague language.

There was a case in California where a patient had a "horrible outcome," he said, after going to a pediatrician who had "labeled themselves as a cosmetic surgeon and you know, really counted on the fact that these patients weren't going to ask that next question."

Board certification isn't a guarantee that a surgery won't lead to complications, Williams noted.

But he argues there's a "lower chance of those things happening when someone has the appropriate training, is performing these procedures in the appropriate facilities and has the appropriate ethical responsibilities and is meeting those."

"I absolutely think there is an additional risk that patients are taking by going to a non-board-certified plastic surgeon to receive a plastic surgery procedure," he added.

Before choosing a provider, Williams also suggests patients look into a doctor's history of medical malpractice complaints and check to see if the state medical board has ever taken action against the provider's license. Utah has a repository of court case documents available online in the Xchange database, while state disciplinary actions can be accessed on the Utah Division of Professional Licensing's website.

One or two issues over the course of a long career likely isn't cause for concern; but "if it's happening multiple times," he said, "there is the question of 'is this physician doing all the right things?'"

Williams encouraged patients with concerns to address those directly with their doctor. A good provider will be open to that conversation, he said, even if they may be unable to discuss many specifics due to patient confidentiality requirements.

All this "unfortunately means a little bit of extra work on the patient's behalf," Williams said. "But when we're dealing with things that could potentially affect someone's life or even cost them their life, these are really important conversations to have."

Roiann Marrelli, a Lehi resident who experienced complications after her breast augmentation in 2021, said she's seen plastic surgery become more normalized in Utah over the last few years.

"You see this girl that's just beautiful and you just [think], 'I used to be tiny like her with a little waist' or whatever and you're done having kids and you can get that body back again," she said. "A couple of years ago, it didn't seem like it was as big as it is now. But it's everywhere: social media, billboards. It's everywhere."

Now, after spending the last three years dealing with the fallout from her surgery, Marrelli says she wouldn't recommend anyone go under the knife.

"Whatever you go through or whatever freak accident happens or whatever, it's just not worth it," she said. "You can go in with a little bit of a self-esteem issue to try to fix that and come out with a worse self-esteem issue."

Marrelli said she didn't realize her surgeon wasn't board-certified until after her surgery and also wasn't aware of past actions taken against his license. She filed a medical malpractice lawsuit against him last year, which was recently settled out of court after she sat down for an interview with FOX 13 News.

As more people opt for cosmetic surgeries, Marrelli said she hopes they can learn from what she went through.

"To be able to let people know that they need to go deeper and search deeper into things is like, a No. 1 thing for me," she said.

<https://www.fox13now.com/news/fox-13-investigates/heres-how-experts-say-you-can-vet-your-plastic-surgeon>