

American Society of Plastic Surgeons Urges Patients to Check Up on Their Surgeons for Their Safety

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After going into surgery for a simple repair of her [breast implants](#), Dinora Rodriguez, 40, awoke from the procedure to find that her plastic surgeon had left her with conjoined breasts – a uni-boob, essentially. Without her knowledge or permission, the surgeon had also nip/tucked her eyelids, leaving Rodriguez with eyes that to this day cannot close all the way.

Rodriguez learned the hard way -- you always have to vet your [plastic surgeon](#).

"A friend had [recommended the doctor to me](#). My biggest mistake is that I didn't check any of her credentials. I found out later that she had done really bad surgeries on some other people too," Rodriguez told ABCnews.com.

The doctor in question was licensed to practice as a plastic surgeon in California, where Rodriguez lives, but she was not board certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery.

After a year of pain and disfigurement, Rodriguez sued her doctor for [malpractice](#) and says she found out that the corrective surgery on her breasts was not even necessary in the first place.

"They were leaking and I believed her. She gave me a good price on the surgery and I said yes," she said.

Now Rodriguez has become the poster child for a new safety campaign spearheaded by the new president of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS), Dr. Malcolm Roth. The campaign, announced Monday at the annual ASPS conference, warns against "white coat deception" – basically, just because a doctor has a white coat, and even an M.D., doesn't mean [they are qualified to perform plastic surgery](#).

In 48 states it is currently legal in the United States for doctors who are not certified by the board of plastic surgeons to practice cosmetic and plastic surgery.

"This means that we have other physicians creeping in who have taken a course and think they can do plastic surgery," said Roth. "It's not the same as going through six years in training specifically in plastic surgery, plus the continual training and code of ethics that are required for those who are board-certified," he said.

"People spend months or years making a decision on which care they're going to purchase – it's no different when having a procedure performed. Plastic surgery is elective, there's plenty of time to do your homework and that's really all we're asking: do your homework," Roth said.

The Check-Up Before the Nip/Tuck

Rodriguez ended up settling her malpractice suit out of court. She says the compensation she received barely covered her reconstructive surgery she needed. Because the surgeon had cut across the two separate "pockets" that normally hold breast tissue, the implants were able to touch in the middle, said Dr. Steven Teitelbaum, a plastic surgeon in Los Angeles who did Rodriguez's reconstructive surgery.

"I had to create two entirely new pockets beneath the muscles to fix it," he told ABCnews.com. "[The first surgeon], violated many basic rules of the way breast implants are done. [The surgeon] cut across muscles you should never cut across," he said.

Unfortunately, because the first surgeon had removed too much skin from Rodriguez's eyelids during the procedure she says she had never asked to have done, there is nothing that can be done to reconstruct her lids -- she will never again be able to fully close her lids and must take medication for the rest of her life to moisten her eyes. Because the first surgeon cut through nerves and muscle, she also has shooting pains in her ribs surrounding her breasts.

The number of non-board certified plastic surgeons practicing is on the rise, Teitelbaum said, because the public is demanding more plastic surgery and with insurance reimbursements so low, many non-plastic surgeons are offering cosmetic procedures in an attempt to maintain their income.

And with the rising number of unqualified plastic surgeons practicing, he says the number of patients suffering from less-than-ideal surgeries is also increasing.

"The crazy thing is that for every Dinora that goes to the media there are at least 100 patients who don't speak up because they are ashamed," Teitelbaum said.

So what can a patient do to check out their doctors before going under the knife?

First and foremost, make sure the doctor is board certified in plastic surgery specifically, which you can do by searching the doctor's name on the [ASPS website](#), Roth said.

In order to be board certified, doctors who do their residency in plastic surgery must pass a rigorous set of written and oral examinations. While they can legally practice plastic surgery even if they don't pass these tests, they will not get board certification.

It's like failing the bar but somehow still being able to practice law. "The heart of it is the state gives a doctor a license to practice medicine, but leaves it up to the public to check if the doctor has the specific credentials to do the procedure their doing," Teitelbaum says. So it's really up to the patient to check these things.

Another important question to ask of your surgeon is whether they have hospital privileges if needed to perform their procedures, Roth says.

"If the nearby hospital won't let them practice under their roof, then something might be up," he says. "Probably, the physicians at the hospitals don't believe that this physician has adequate training."