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As more and more cosmetic procedures become readily available and mainstream, easy access to treatments and procedures come with serious concerns. As captured on the popular TV show “Botched,” things can go wrong, causing deformities and even life-threatening consequences. Anyone can call himself a *cosmetic surgeon*; however, to be considered a *plastic surgeon* one must be certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery. **Dr. Stanley Poulos**, a Board-Certified Plastic Surgeon in the San Francisco area, offers the following red flags not to ignore when considering a cosmetic procedure.

**DISCOUNT COUPONS** — Discount coupons make sense if you’re looking for a haircut or a massage, not for plastic surgery. “Don’t bargain shop when it comes to something serious like surgery,” Dr. Poulos warns. “You want to make sure you research the average prices and if something seems too steep of a discount, beware!”

**THE SURGEON IS NOT BOARD-CERTIFIED** — Look for credentials: someone who is Board-Certified in plastic surgery is accredited by the American Board of Plastic

Surgery. If they are, they usually have this credential prominently visible in their office and on their website. This means the surgeon has had at least six years of surgical training with two or three years devoted specifically to plastic surgery, has passed rigorous oral and written examinations and has demonstrated safe and ethical surgical practice.

**LOFTY PROMISES** — “Any surgeon that promises to make you look like a celebrity or says he can make you look 30 years younger, is over-promising,” emphasizes Dr. Poulous. “A skilled surgeon knows the potential and limitations of surgery and will be clear about this from the start. A good surgeon will want you to look like an improved version of you, not someone else.”

**THE OPERATING FACILITY IS NOT ACCREDITED** — Often plastic surgery is performed in an ambulatory care center or the surgeon’s office-based surgical facility. “Either way, you want to make sure the facility is properly accredited,” stresses Dr. Poulos. Accreditation ensures that strict standards are met for proper equipment, safety, surgeon credentials, and staffing.

**THEY TRY TO “UP SELL”** — An initial consultation with a plastic surgeon should be a collaborative effort in which doctor and patient come to an agreement about the best course of treatment. It is reasonable for the surgeon to suggest alternative approaches, but it should become worrisome if he uses high-pressure tactics. “Your surgeon may suggest consideration of more or different procedures than your initial request, but should have sound reasons why this is his/her advice,” says Dr. Poulos.

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**BRIEF CONSULTATION/LACK OF PROFESSIONALISM** — The first visit with a plastic surgeon must be a thorough, get-to-know-you session in which both patient and doctor determine if they can work together. “Trust how the overall consultation experience feels to you,” suggests Dr. Poulos. Is the staff friendly and welcoming? Was your phone call handled professionally? Did they follow through on getting your promised information? Are they clear about all costs and how the procedure will go?

**CENSORSHIP OR LAW SUITS** — Just because a doctor has faced a malpractice lawsuit, it does not mean that the surgeon is incompetent. “In today’s medical climate, even first-rate surgeons are sometimes sued,” shares Poulos. “However, be wary of a surgeon who has been sued more than a few times or have been censured by the state medical board,” he warns.

**NO B&A** — If you are interested in a procedure, you should see what the physician can do for you. “One of the best ways to see the quality of work is to view before and after photos of their actual patients,” shares Dr. Poulos. “If they won’t show you any, they may not have enough experience or success in that particular procedure.”

**WHEN TO CONSIDER A DIFFERENT SURGEON** — “Searching for a cosmetic surgeon is more manageable when you use a clearly defined system to make the choice,” shares Dr. Poulos. “Consider all options and weigh them cautiously. If you’re consulting with a cosmetic surgeon and any of the above red-flags come up, consider looking for a different surgeon.”

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