



Surgeon Qualifications and Certifications

Whether you are referred to a physician for surgical care, or you make the choice yourself, don't take your surgeon's qualifications for granted. Make sure your operation is performed by a competent physician whose specialty is surgery. It could be the most important decision you make.

Here are some qualifications to look for:

1. Board Certification

A good sign of a U.S. surgeon's competence is board certification, meaning a surgeon holds certification by a surgical board that is approved by the American Board of Medical Specialties. In Canada, a qualified surgeon attains his or her certification by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada.

When you choose a surgeon who is properly certified in a surgical specialty, you are assured that he or she has completed years of residency training in his or her specialty and has demonstrated knowledge and competence by successfully completing a rigorous examination.

2. Fellowship in the American College of Surgeons

The letters F.A.C.S. (Fellow of the American College of Surgeons) after a surgeon's name are an indication to the patient that the surgeon has passed a thorough evaluation of both professional competence and ethical fitness. Fellows are board-certified surgeons or, in unusual circumstances, have met other standards comparable to board certification. A Fellow has committed herself unequivocally to place the welfare of her patients above any other consideration; to avoid division of fees with other physicians; to make her fees commensurate with the services she renders; and to refrain from performing unjustified operations. In instances where a Fellow has been found to violate these principles, she has been subjected to disciplinary action and even has been expelled from Fellowship.



3. Practice in an Accredited Health Care Facility

Your surgeon will arrange for your operation to be performed in a hospital or ambulatory surgery center where he has been approved for practice. It is a good idea to make sure that the hospital is accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO), a professionally sponsored program to stimulate a higher quality of patient care in hospitals and other health care facilities.

There is also an accreditation option that is available for ambulatory or outpatient surgery centers. If your operation is scheduled to be performed in one of these facilities, you can check to see if the center has been accredited by a nationally recognized organization such as the Joint Commission or the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care. When a hospital or ambulatory surgery center has voluntarily sought accreditation, it is a good indication that the facility is committed to providing the best possible care for its patients.

If you are unsure of a surgeon's qualifications, don't hesitate to ask her about them or direct your inquiries to your local or state medical society, to the hospital or facility where your operation will be performed, to the surgical department of the nearest medical school, or to your family physician. They will be able to tell you if a surgeon is board certified and/or a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons.

To determine if a hospital or ambulatory surgery center is accredited, contact your local or state hospital association, or call the facility and ask if it is accredited by the Joint Commission or the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care.

In some instances, such as during an emergency or in areas where fully trained surgeons in all specialties are not available, the performance of certain operations by physicians who are not surgical specialists may be in the best interest of patients.