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Questions To Ask Your Plastic Surgeon

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Is Your Surgeon A Plastic Surgeon?

Believe it or not, there are only around 300 fully trained plastic surgeons in the UK. Not all plastic surgery is done by plastic surgeons – that’s right, you heard me – not all plastic surgery is done by plastic surgeons.

Plastic surgery is one of the most highly contested surgical specialities and the numbers of surgeons that are accepted in to the training scheme each year is strictly limited. To become a plastic surgeon, a surgeon must first undergo general surgical training leading to the qualification of MRCS or FRCS (Member of Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons) and then they can apply for further training to become a plastic surgeon. This involves a further 6 years of supervised training in plastic surgery. At the end of this 6 years there is a set of examinations which test whether the surgeon is safe and capable of working independently without supervision. Surgeons who are successful will then be able to apply for a Consultant Post in the NHS and will be entered on the specialist register on the GMC (General Medical Council). You can check whether your surgeon is on the specialist register with the GMC by searching on the GMC website (www.gmc-uk.org) or look for the letters FRCS(Plast) after their name.

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Is Your Surgeon A Specialist?

The pinnacle of any surgeon's career is to obtain a consultant post in the NHS. If your surgeon is, or has been a consultant plastic surgeon in the NHS, then you can be assured that he or she is fully trained. Surgeons are encouraged to specialise these days and you will find that most plastic surgeons will specialise in one of the following areas:

- Breast surgery
- Hand surgery
- Head and neck surgery
- Cleft/craniofacial/paediatric plastic surgery
- Burns surgery

Cosmetic surgery does not exist as a sub-speciality in itself, so you should look for a surgeon with a sub-specialty interest that matches the surgery that you require. Most plastic surgeons perform liposuction and tummy tucks but if you require breast surgery – choose a breast specialist, or if you require facial plastic surgery – choose a head and neck specialist.

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Where Will My Surgery Take Place?

Plastic surgery is one of the few specialities in which there are commercial companies that provide the service alongside individual consultant surgeons. In most other branches of medicine, it is only consultant surgeons who can provide a service to patients because they are able to register with any of the major private hospitals. In plastic surgery, there are commercial providers who have set up their own hospitals and so can employ surgeons who are not eligible to work in the major private hospital groups. Aside from the fact that these surgeons may not be fully trained plastic surgeons, you need to be clear on where the surgery will take place and the facilities available.

I always advise patients about the dangers of going abroad for cosmetic surgery and the same applies for having surgery in a hospital that is far away from your home. You will need to consider the logistics of travelling to and from the hospital for surgery, which may add extra stress and inconvenience as well as the inconvenience for your friends and relatives who may wish to visit. Perhaps more importantly, you need to make sure that you are prepared to go back to the hospital if you need to have any revision surgery.

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Are These Your Before and After Photos?

Most surgeons will show before and after photographs in order to give an expectation of the sort of results that might be achievable for you. It is worth making sure that the photographs are of cases that your surgeon has performed. I try to rotate the photographs that I show to ensure that I show relatively recent cases and a representative selection of results rather than just showing the best results I have ever achieved. It is important to develop realistic expectations to ensure that you can make an informed decision as to whether surgery is right for you.

You might also find it helpful to talk to a patient who has had surgery as this can give a different perspective on the procedure. Your surgeon should be able to facilitate this for you.

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What About The Aftercare?

This is perhaps the most important question to ask your surgeon. The aftercare is crucial and you need to feel comfortable that you will be looked after.

It is not only the fact that you might need revision surgery, but you need to make sure that you will be listened to and looked after following your surgery. You will sometimes hear that providers offer 10 years of aftercare or a lifetime of aftercare, but you need to be clear about what that covers. There are three aspects to aftercare packages:

- **Aftercare for follow up appointments**
 - Will you be charged for follow up appointments?
 - Is there a time limit on these follow up appointments?
- **Aftercare for surgery**
 - Am I covered for complications – such as haematoma and infection?
 - Am I covered for revision surgery and if so how long for? It is important to be clear on what is covered. Are investigations such as xrays and scans included?

- **Aftercare for Implants**

If you are having breast implants, they will have their own aftercare packages, or warranties. I am afraid that this can be confusing too. Most implant manufacturers will cover rupture or failure of the shell of the implant, although they may require the implant to be sent back to the manufacturer to prove that the implant was not damaged on implantation. Some manufacturers will also cover capsular contracture or hardening of the implant. The implant warranties will usually only offer a replacement implant, and this could include another implant for the other side and may allow for a change in size. The hospital costs associated with changing the implants will not be covered, although some manufacturers will offer cash incentives to help cover these costs.