



On being a cosmetic surgeon

We've all heard cosmetic surgery horror stories resulting from inexperienced or incompetent surgeons. So how can the average person accurately assess the expertise and competence of a surgeon before trusting them with something so important?

Beautiful You Magazine spoke with Cosmetic and Reconstructive Surgeons Tristan de Chalain and Murray Beagley to find out a little more about how New Zealand surgeons gain their cosmetic surgery qualifications and experience.

It's a little known fact that in New Zealand there are no legal regulations for using the term 'cosmetic surgeon'. In fact, anyone with a medical degree can call themselves a 'cosmetic surgeon', without having undergone any formal surgical training.

By contrast, a 'plastic surgeon' is a closely defined and legally protected title. "All plastic surgeons are listed with the New Zealand Medical Council as vocationally registered specialists in plastic surgery," explains Tristan de Chalain, "they must have completed several years of hands-on apprentice-style training, working under close supervision in a mentored training program as a registrar. In order to graduate, surgeons must first pass a series of strict examinations which will, if passed, attest to their competence."

De Chalain suggests that when you're looking for a New Zealand surgeon, be sure to check that he or she has the letters FRACS following their name. "This is the main qualification recognized by the Medical Council of New Zealand as meeting the requirements to become a vocationally registered specialist surgeon in New Zealand. If your surgeon has specialised in plastic surgery, this should also be stated on his or her degree certificate." By qualifying with a FRACS in plastic surgery, the surgeon has had both theoretical and practical experience in cosmetic surgery throughout their training.

"By the time the registrar graduates after seven or eight years of training, they will have seen and been exposed to the full spectrum of cosmetic surgery. Most graduates then go on to perform overseas fellowships in their chosen areas of interest. By the time this is finished it's not unusual for a plastic surgeon to have had ten or twelve years of on the job training before they go into practice," he says.

Murray Beagley explains that plastic surgeons with a passion and specific interest in cosmetic surgery may

be elected members to various organizations dedicated to ongoing education and patient welfare. "Such groups include the NZ Foundation for Cosmetic Plastic Surgery, the Australasian Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery and the International Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery. These memberships are usually listed in the surgeons' websites."

Beagley suggests that word of mouth and the advice of friends is the best way to find a good surgeon. "Increasingly though, many people are finding their surgeons online. If you are interested in a certain procedure or just looking for a good surgeon, you will be able to find all the information you need from an internet search. Have a look at their website and check their credentials for yourself."

If you do decide to go ahead but have some last minute doubts or questions, then it is important to immediately discuss your concerns. "Most surgeons will provide additional pre-operative consultations at no extra cost to make sure both parties are in agreement about the operative plan. It is far better for all involved to avoid or delay an operation, rather than undergo surgery in an uncertain frame of mind and possibly regret the decision later," explains Beagley.

Cosmetic surgery is very much like any other consumer product, in that the buyer must beware. Research is important and you should not hesitate to ask your surgeon about his or her history, view case studies and if possible, request to talk with previous patients. Beagley explains that a reputable surgeon should have no hesitation in providing testimonials and arranging contact with a previous patient to discuss any aspects of the surgery. "It is a relatively simple matter to ask a previous patient to call or email a prospective patient (anonymously, if desired) to allay concerns or talk through post operative issues," he says.

Did you know ...

The term Plastic Surgery derives from an old Greek word 'plastikos', meaning 'to mould or shape.'

Tristan de Chalain has been in private practice in Remuera since 1997. He is also a consulting Plastic Surgeon at Middlemore Hospital, and visiting specialist at National Women's Hospital, Auckland Hospital and Starship Children's Hospital. He is immediate Past president of the NZ Foundation for Cosmetic Plastic Surgery.

Murray Beagley is a Cosmetic and Reconstructive Surgeon in practice at Plastic Surgery Auckland, St Marks Road, Remuera. His private practice offers a broad range of cosmetic, paediatric, hand, skin cancer and reconstructive surgeries. www.cosmeticsurgeon.org.nz