



# Editorial: Limit who can do cosmetic surgery

Updated 5d 21h ago

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Kellee Lee-Howard, a Miami mother of six, died one day after she got a liposuction from a doctor who wasn't board-certified in any medical specialty and who performed the operation in a place not registered as a surgery center. The autopsy report said she died of an overdose of the painkiller lidocaine.

### OPPOSING VIEW: [Let oral surgeons do cosmetic work](#)

In nearby Weston, Fla., Rohie Kah-Orukotan, 37, was rushed to the hospital and died a week after getting liposuction from another doctor who wasn't a plastic surgeon. That surgery was performed at a "medspa" where she also got manicures.

These doctors are among a soaring number certified in other specialties (or in none) who have branched into the more lucrative field of cosmetic surgery, USA TODAY's Jayne O'Donnell reported last week. [As she found](#), the results can be tragic.

Though there are always people in any profession who'll put greed above ethics and do work they might be ill-prepared to handle, few can do as much harm as doctors. The hardest thing to understand is why neither the states nor the medical profession has taken stronger steps to control this dangerous practice.

The roots of the problem lie in the way the profession is set up, combined with the advent of private surgical centers and medical advertising. Once doctors are licensed by states as physicians, there's little to stop them from doing operations outside their specialty and beyond their training. In Florida, for example, "you can do anything in your office that you can get a patient to consent to," says Miami plastic surgeon Adam

Rubinstein. For the patient, "it's sort of like going to a Chinese restaurant to get Italian food." At least a restaurant choice isn't likely to kill or disfigure you.

Established medical specialty boards do certify doctors, such as plastic surgeons and other specialists, and for many years hospitals served as the gatekeepers to prevent physicians from jumping outside their specialties. The vast majority of hospitals won't give them privileges to operate. But today, with greater ability to perform operations in private offices and surgical centers, more

Family photo

Kellee Lee-Howard, a Miami mother and wife, died Valentine's Day 2010, a day after getting liposuction.

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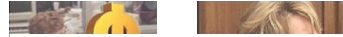
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medical doctors and dentists are bypassing the gatekeepers and doing unfamiliar procedures. Some are even training others to wield the plastic surgeon's scalpel, sometimes in seminars that last mere days.

Unsuspecting patients are unaware of the danger. And with increasing numbers of people seeking to look younger and thinner, unscrupulous doctors have plenty of consumers to prey on.

A few states are struggling with how to control the problem. California and Florida have tried advertising restrictions: If a doctor states in an ad that he is board-certified, he has to specify the area.

Most legislators and regulators, however, have shown no stomach for stopping doctors trained in one specialty from jumping into another. Sixteen states have even exacerbated the problem by making it easier for dentists trained as oral surgeons to perform cosmetic surgery. [New York](#) is considering joining them, after the New York State Dental Association showered legislators with \$2.5 million in political donations since 2004. James Hinsdale, a general surgeon and president of the [California Medical Association](#), states the obvious: "Plastic surgeons, no matter how you mince it, have had the best training to do plastic surgery."

Patients have a responsibility to check out their doctors. But that can be a tall order amid a sea of acronyms identifying specialties and advertisements promising safe, quick, inexpensive surgeries.

Medical societies and state boards are in the best position to police doctors straying beyond their expertise. Instead, they have left the various specialties to battle this out as if it were a turf war rather than what it is — [a danger to unwary patients](#), some of whom have paid for their naiveté with their lives.

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[Tina Woodruff](#)

6:39 PM on September 20, 2011

Score: 3

Mr. Jones,

[Report Abuse](#)

You are wasting your time. State regulators know well that:

1) The patient in question died of poly-drug toxicity and not lidocaine as you misinform on your editorial

2) Most deaths from cosmetic surgery in the state are in the hands of board certified plastic surgeons!!!

You are better served to dedicate to publishing the truth instead next time.



[cynicalme](#)

6:45 AM on September 21, 2011

Score: 7

If authorities make plastic surgery to tough (and too expensive) in the U/S. , people will flock to some third-world doctor in some third-world medical facility that includes air fare in their discounted packages.

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[USA Imploding](#)

9:53 AM on September 21, 2011

Score: 0

Who cares!!!

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[TEMP](#)

10:56 AM on September 21, 2011

Score: 2

Darwin

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[mikemark](#)

11:04 AM on September 21, 2011

Score: 10

I don't have a house or garage built by someone that is not a licensed contractor.

I don't go to someone to have my hair cut by someone that is not board licensed stylist.

I don't go to a dentist to have my teeth cleaned by someone that is not a board certified DDS.

And I also don't go to anyone that is not licensed to have ( fat sucked out of my body ) . as in liposuction.

Certain things in life just make common sence .. in the hiring of these professionals , you get what you pay for , and in some cases that includes " DEATH " .

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[Volante](#)

11:24 AM on September 21, 2011

Score: -6

All these regulations are going to do are put shady cosmetic surgeons out of work. They need jobs too!

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[Arquah](#)

4:15 PM on September 21, 2011

Score: 1

I don't understand why we don't have this in the first place. Any SURGERY should only be done by a trained surgeon/physician. Not just any Joe on the street.

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