

Fake Plastic Surgeon Actually Cut Into People

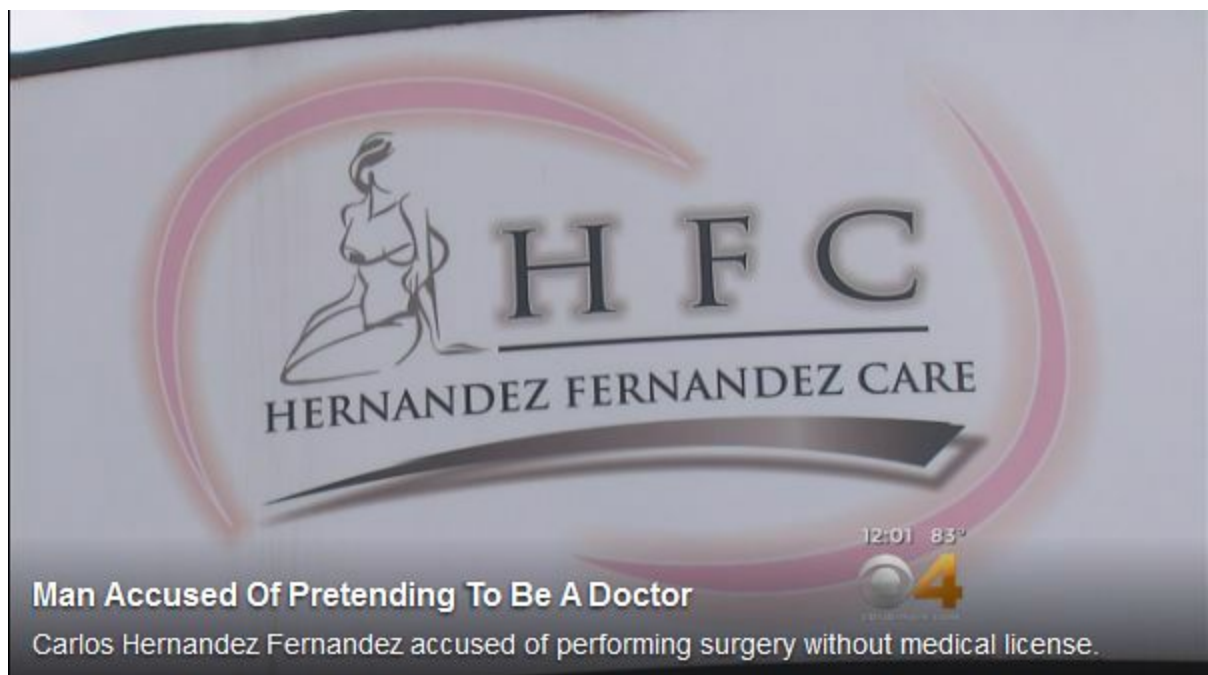
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A surgical assistant was recently arrested for posing as a plastic surgeon and performing procedures on unwitting patients. (Photo: Getty Images)



Earlier this month, officers from Denver arrested a 36-year-old surgical assistant who had been posing as a plastic surgeon since at least January 2015.

As reported by the *Denver Post*, Carlos Hernandez Fernandez ran his own cosmetic surgery clinic and had been performing surgeries, including tummy tucks and face-lifts, with no general anesthesia and only local anesthesia. On the website Healthgrades.com, he claimed he had admitting privileges at two Denver hospitals — Centura Health-Porter

Adventist Hospital and Swedish Medical Center — and had a five-star patient satisfaction rating based on two reviews.

Fernandez has been arrested on charges of criminal impersonation, illegally practicing as a medical doctor, sexual assault, and child abuse. He has been released on \$2,000 bail.

As terrifying as this news is, this isn't the first time unlicensed doctors have performed surgery on unsuspecting patients. It happened twice in Florida (in 2011 and in 2015), as well as in New York City in 2012.

So how can you protect yourself from becoming a victim under a fake surgeon's scalpel? First and foremost, find out if your doctor is board certified.

"Board certification is the highest level of certification and the only legitimate certification for doctors and specialists," Stafford R. Broumand, M.D, a board-certified plastic surgeon at 740 Park Plastic Surgery in New York City, tells Yahoo Beauty.

You can research any medical specialist by going through the database of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS). "Whether you're looking for a plastic surgeon, a gynecologist, or a dermatologist, you can look to see what is the official board that certifies those specific doctors."

Broumand further explains that a board-certified plastic surgeon will be certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery, which is a subset of the ABMS.

It's important to note that many doctors claim to be certified by another board— the American Board of Cosmetic Surgery (AACS) — which is not the same thing. According to several doctors on RealSelf.com, physicians who are "certified" by the AACS have not had plastic surgery residency training. "The reality of that is you can get that certification by mailing \$400 and a letter to some guy in Vegas and he'll send you the certification," Broumand says. "It's meaningless. It's bogus, and it's deceptive. I've been to other doctor's offices that are doing 'cosmetic procedures,' and they have a sign up that says they're certified by the American Board of Cosmetic Surgery. It's not a sanctioned board."

In fact, the AACS site itself states: "Although AACS does not certify cosmetic surgeons, it encourages all members to become certified by the American Board of Cosmetic Surgery (ABCS), the American Board of Facial Cosmetic Surgery (ABFCS), or the International Division of the American Board of Cosmetic Surgery (ID of ABCS)."

Aside from confirming a plastic surgeon's credentials, there are a handful of red flags to watch for when choosing a doctor, such as a surgeon who offers discount coupons.

“Don’t bargain price when it comes to something serious like surgery,” John Zannis, M.D., a board-certified plastic surgeon at Zannis Center for Plastic Surgery in New Bern, N.C., tells Yahoo Beauty.

Broumand agrees. “You get what you pay for,” he says. “The reality is to become a plastic surgeon and to then get boarded in plastic surgery is unbelievably difficult and extremely rigorous. To have someone who has done this training, that has taken a lot of time, a lot of effort, [and] who has spent their lifetime trying to get that education and certification — this person wouldn’t just give their services away for nothing.”

Zannis offers other warning signs, including surgeons who make lofty promises (“You’ll look 30 years younger!”), who try to sell you on undergoing additional procedures, surgeons who have been sued multiple times, and those who rely heavily on paid advertisements.

“The number of ads a surgeon displays is often inversely proportional to the quality of the doctor,” says Zannis.

And you may want to look elsewhere if your consultation consists of sitting by yourself in a room while viewing a video about the doctor’s services, followed by a brief meeting. If you find out beforehand that you won’t even be meeting with the surgeon during your consult, “don’t waste your time,” says Zannis.