

The Unique Training of Facial Plastic Surgeons

All facial plastic surgeons are physicians who have undergone many years of education and training including college and medical school. After 20 years of education the physician applies for a "residency" in a particular subject. A "resident" is a licensed physician who is pursuing further post-graduate training after receiving a doctor's degree from medical school.

Most facial plastic surgeons do their residency training in Otolaryngology-Head-and-Neck Surgery.

Such residents have succeeded in a very competitive and selective process. Most come from the upper 25% of their medical school class. Then residency begins with one to two years of general surgical training. The resident then embarks on specialty training in Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery, which lasts 4 to 6 years.

In the Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery residency, the physician studies anatomy, physiology, illness and surgical treatment for face, head and neck.

After completing that residency, the surgeon then takes the two-day written certification examination, as well as a separate oral examination, in the specialty of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery. If the surgeon passed that examination, the surgeon becomes 'board certified' in Otolaryngology.

The examination and residency studies focus on function as well as aesthetics. While it is nice to have a beautiful nose, the surgeon wants to maintain or even improve its normal functions of breathing and smelling. The surgeon also studies ear and throat surgery. The surgeon studies what is called "trauma" wounds from external sources. Parts of this world are violent, and there is an incredible volume of smashed, cut and battered faces. Spending hundreds of hours repairing and reconstructing these victims serves as an excellent training ground for the training facial plastic surgeon. Reconstructing the traumatized face deepens knowledge about bony and soft tissue anatomy, normal and abnormal appearance, and all the requisite principles of facial reconstruction: the same skills that are important in Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery.

This training in the primary surgical specialty of otolaryngology/head-and-neck surgery represents the typical five-year training after graduation from medical school. Some facial plastic surgeons also enter aspects of the field through similar training in other specialties, including ophthalmology, dermatology, and plastic surgery of the body.

Some surgeons with special interest in facial plastic and reconstructive surgery then compete for one of the few and coveted facial plastic and reconstructive surgery fellowships. This is a full-year program offering a unique opportunity to personally study and be mentored by one of the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery's master surgeons.

Many facial plastic surgeons go still further and sit for a second two-day written board examination and one-day oral examination given by the American Board of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery. That highly prestigious certifying board requires not only successful completion of the examination, but also peer review of hundreds of surgeries performed by the applicant. Only surgeons previously certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery and/or the American Board of Otolaryngology may be certified by the American Board of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery.

It is the high level of excellence and meticulous training, that forms the foundation of trust, expertise, and knowledge in this special class of surgeons.