

## ABMS “In the News”

June 2008





## Press Clips, Media & Releases

June 2008

Part of ABMS' strategic mission is to communicate to appropriate external stakeholders that board certification is known as a major marker of quality for physician practice performance and that ABMS is recognized as the organization that establishes standards and criteria.

Shown in this book are the numerous mentions that ABMS has received in the press and media from June 2008.

If you have any questions or come across other mentions of ABMS in the media, press or on the Internet, please direct all copies to Lori Boukas, Director of Marketing and Communications so this information can be published back to the boards.

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American Board  
of Medical Specialties  
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# Relevant Media

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## Alumni News

### 1987

**Dr. Kevin B. Weiss, SM**, was appointed president and CEO of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) in September. Weiss is a professor of medicine in the Division of General Medicine and director of the Institute for Healthcare Studies at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine, in Chicago. ABMS oversees physician certification in the United States.



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# Press Clips

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## ABMS Monthly Media Report June, 2008

Following is a summary of media coverage identified during the month of June related to the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS). A brief description of each story, along with an excerpt is provided as well as available links for complete articles. For other articles contact [lboukas@abms.org](mailto:lboukas@abms.org).

### ABMS Mentions

#### Story #1

*Hartford Courant*

“Getting Fingered For The Board”

Dr. Herbert Keating

June 1, 2008

This opinion piece is written by Dr. Herbert Keating, who practices internal and geriatric medicine at Prohealth Physicians in Bloomfield and is clinical professor of medicine at the University of Connecticut. Dr. Keating explains what it means to be board-certified, why he thinks it’s important to be treated by board-certified physicians and his experience in taking the continuing certification exam from the American Board of Internal Medicine, which included fingerprint identification.

ABMS and Specialty Member Board Mentions: “In this age of self-proclaimed expertise and mail-away credentials, there are a lot of quack ‘boards’ around, and a patient has to be careful. What board certification means for MDs is a certificate from one of the 24 member boards of the **American Board of Medical Specialties**. These boards include every legitimate medical field, from plastic surgery (**American Board of Plastic Surgery**) to pediatrics (**American Board of Pediatrics**). When I pass the exam, the final step in an otherwise arduous process, my certification--or actually, my continuing certification--will come from the **American Board of Internal Medicine**.”

<http://www.courant.com/news/health/hc-drkeating0601.artjun01,0,1506564,print.story>

#### Story #2

*Commercial Appeal* (Memphis, Tenn)

“Family Health...Take Charge! Planning Ahead for Surgery Can Improve Your Results”

Staff Reports

June 2, 2008

This article is about what consumers can do to plan ahead for surgery. According to the article, consumers should take an active role in all of the decisions made about their health care. If after careful consideration surgery is the best treatment, the article states, consumers need to do their homework to select their doctors and hospital or surgery center. The article advises consumers ask their primary care doctor for advice about the proposed surgery, names of good surgeons and to check on surgeon qualifications.

ABMS Mention: “It is best to select a surgeon who is **ABMS board certified (American Board of Medical Specialties)** and specially trained in the procedure.”

<http://www.commercialappeal.com/news/2008/jun/02/family-health-take-charge-planning-ahead-for-can/?printer=1/>

### Story #3

PRWeb

“Online Physician Ratings: Proceed with Caution Leading Physician Certification Organization Offers Consumers Tips for Using Doctor Rating Sites”

June 12, 2008

The American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) distributed a June 12 press release on PR Web called “Online Physician Ratings: Proceed with Caution, *Leading Physician Certification Organization Offers Consumers Tips for Using Doctor Rating Sites*” about what consumers need to consider when researching a doctor online. The release explains that online physician ratings can be helpful, but it cannot provide a complete picture of a physician’s qualifications to deliver good healthcare. A detailed report of the pick-up will be sent to you next week.

<http://www.prweb.com/releases/2008/6/prweb1017704.htm>

### Story #4

HealthNewsDigest.com

“Online Physician Ratings: Proceed with Caution”

June 15, 2008

The American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) distributed a June 12 press release on PR Web called “Online Physician Ratings: Proceed with Caution, *Leading Physician Certification Organization Offers Consumers Tips for Using Doctor Rating Sites*” about what consumers need to consider when researching a doctor online. The release explains that online physician ratings can be helpful, but it cannot provide a complete picture of a physician’s qualifications to deliver good healthcare. The release was picked up by HealthNewsDigest.com.

[http://www.healthnewsdigest.com/news/Patient\\_230/Online\\_Physician\\_Ratings\\_Proceed\\_with\\_Caution.shtml](http://www.healthnewsdigest.com/news/Patient_230/Online_Physician_Ratings_Proceed_with_Caution.shtml)

**Story #5**

MedicalNewsToday.com

“The American Society For Aesthetic Plastic Surgery Takes Time Out For Patient Safety”

June 19, 2008

This article is about the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS) taking a “Time Out” to offer suggestions to help prevent wrong-site surgery and other preventable surgical mistakes for patients having aesthetic plastic surgery. The ASAPS is also encouraging patients to “take a time out” and offers a list of suggestions on how they can do their part to ensure their safety and satisfaction. One suggestion is for patients to “take time out to check board-certification.”

ABMS & Specialty Board Mention: “A doctor’s board-certification is the best indicator of his or her training in a particular medical or surgical specialty. Look for certification by the **American Board of Plastic Surgery (ABPS)**, the only **Board** recognized by the **American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS)** to certify doctors in the specialty of plastic surgery. ”

<http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/111986.php>

The May 19 *Los Angeles Times* article entitled, “Doctor Ratings: Is Your Healthcare Hot or Not?” by Shari Roan was picked up by the following outlets:

**Story #6**

*Hartford Courant*

“Rating Doctor’s Competency”

June 23, 2008

<http://www.courant.com/features/lifestyle/hc-healthdocratings.artjun23,0,2918596.story?page=1>

**Story #7**

PressofAtlanticCity.com

“Rating Doctors Online: Hot or Not?”

June 23, 2008

<http://www.pressofatlanticcity.com/114/story/188889.html>

This article is about the trend toward websites that permit consumers to rate and review their doctors much the same way as other online services that rate hotels and plumbers. According to the article, patients and site operators say the trend is good for consumers and good for healthcare. Thoughtful doctors, they say, will provide better customer service because of the feedback, and the bad ones will no longer be able to hide. Many physicians say the reviews on RateMDs.com, Vitals.com, DrScore.com and other sites are skewed by disgruntled patients and are thus unfair, pushing some doctors to near-ruin after a single post.

ABMS Mention: “Once reverential of doctors, consumers today are more comfortable criticizing their physicians, says **Dr. Kevin Weiss, president of the American Board of Medical Specialties**, an organization that sets performance standards and certifies doctors.”

“There is a lot of pent-up frustration,” **Dr. Weiss** says. “Costs are going up, and people are paying more out of pocket. Plus, there is a lot of data on how the healthcare system needs to do better in terms of quality and safety.”

“Doctors shouldn't be rated like any other product or service provider, such as a car or car mechanic, says **Dr. Kevin Weiss**. Medicine involves highly individual and personalized interactions, he says, and each medical case and doctor-patient relationship is unique.”

“With TVs and cars, people can subjectively talk about their experience because you have a consistent product” says **Dr. Weiss**. “But with healthcare there is so much blended into the experience, it's hard to do an evaluation. You want a doctor who is both technically competent but also one who can communicate and understand the human dimensions beyond the technical aspect of good care.”

<http://www.latimes.com/features/health/la-he-docratings19-2008may19,0,7204618,print.story>

### Story #8

*Washington Post* Shop To It Blog

“Tuesday Tips: Shopping for a Doctor”

Tania Anderson

June 24, 2008

This blog article lists tips consumers can use for finding a doctor. According to the article, it is best to consider the features you want in a doctor before a medical emergency occurs. Tips include having a get-to-know-you meeting with doctors you're considering, asking for a copy of their “patients' handbook” to learn how their practice operates and checking board certifications. Consumers are cautioned not to automatically rule out a doctor who got their medical education overseas. Where they did their residency and whether they're board certified should be bigger determining factors, the article states.

ABMS Mention: “Go with a doctor that's been board certified, says (Jim) King (president of the American Academy of Family Physicians). While every doctor needs a license to diagnose and treat patients, seeking a board certification is voluntary. But it demonstrates their expertise in a particular specialty or subspecialty. The **American Board of Medical Specialties** has a free tool to check if doctors are board certified.”

[http://blog.washingtonpost.com/shoptoit/2008/06/tuesday\\_tips\\_shopping\\_for\\_a\\_do.html](http://blog.washingtonpost.com/shoptoit/2008/06/tuesday_tips_shopping_for_a_do.html)

# courant.com

## Hartford Courant

### Getting FingereD For The Board

<http://www.courant.com/news/health/hc-drkeating0601.artjun01,0,1506564,print.story>

By Dr. Herbert Keating, First Opinion, June 1, 2008

I find myself sitting for my board exam.

For me to be able to claim that I am "board-certified" as a physician, this examination is one of the requirements.

In any situation other than an emergency, I would not want myself or members of my family to be treated by a physician who is not **board-certified**. But I find that many people are only vaguely aware of what **board-certified** means.

In this age of self-proclaimed expertise and mail-away credentials, there are a lot of quack "boards" around, and a patient has to be careful. What board certification means for MDs is a certificate from one of the 24 member boards of the **American Board of Medical Specialties**. These boards include every legitimate medical field, from plastic surgery (**American Board of Plastic Surgery**) to pediatrics (**American Board of Pediatrics**). X

When I pass the exam, the final step in an otherwise arduous process, my certification — or, actually, my continuing certification — will come from the **American Board of Internal Medicine**.

The last time I took this particular exam, I had to travel to Philadelphia with a couple of No. 2 pencils. This time, the technological revolution lets me take my exam in front of a computer screen in beautiful suburban Hartford. Just as the technology has changed, medicine has changed. One's doctors need to keep up; certification and recertification are part of that: keeping pace.

After coughing up my driver's license and my passport and having my picture taken, I am led to a locker area by a young woman who is garbed in a no-nonsense business suit the red-brown color of dark cedar. She hands me a key to locker No. 1.

I take the locker assignment as a propitious sign. "All right," I say out loud, psyching myself up for the arduous task at hand, "I am No. 1!"

"Everything in the locker, please," my anonymous hostess commands, only slightly less humorlessly than the TSA at the airport.

"Wallet, keys, watch, sunglasses ... everything."

I start a joke, but she thinks she has heard it before.

"You can keep your belt on. And your shoes."

I do as I am told, and she leads me back to her desk.

"Finger in there," she gestures, and I place my right index finger on the single-digit manicurist platform. I hear a click and see a semi-smudged fingerprint projected onto a computer screen.

"Every time you enter or leave the testing area, you need to have your fingerprint confirmed."

"Understood," I answer obediently but absurdly wonder whether maybe now, in 2008, the preferred response is "copy that."

"Right around there," she gestures, and I grope around the indicated corner where another anonymous but friendlier woman greets me.

"One more time," the second hostess says. "Finger in there." She points to her very own finger receptacle, and again the smudge appears,

"It really is me," I offer, and this time I get a smile.

She scans the list. "OK, you are here for the ... state police academy exam? No, no. Here you are. Geriatrics."

I nod.

I hear another click, this from the dead bolt of the plate-glass door through which she escorts me into a very quiet, gray-carpeted conference room filled with computer screens, each at its own cubicle. I estimate 15 stations. But I am to have my very own inner chamber along the near wall and to the back.

My attendant reads from a note card.

"You have two hours for each session, with 20-minute breaks between them. If you finish a session and wish to leave early, the unused portion of the session will be added to the break. You have the option to take a tutorial about the exam, should you so desire. The time you use for the tutorial is over and above the time allocated to the exam."

"Just hold up your hand if you have any problem or want to leave early. Good luck," she says, and leaves, sealing me in my glass chamber.

Thirty seconds later, my computer screen welcomes me to the board exam in geriatric medicine. I am now officially "sitting for the boards."

Six hours later, after two finger-printed breaks, I am finished.

My mind feels as if it has been vacuumed clean.

I am oblivious to the cold drizzle of the Hartford afternoon as, hatless, I wander around in the parking lot, wondering where I put the car.

As with all good exams, this one affirms what I know, or think I know.

Of course, I hope I know enough to pass, but I am also reminded of areas that I need to study. Again.

Dr. Herbert Keating practices internal and geriatric medicine at Prohealth Physicians in Bloomfield and is clinical professor of medicine at the University of Connecticut. His column includes real stories, but names are changed to protect patient confidentiality. His website is [FearLessAging.net](http://FearLessAging.net).

## Family Health ... Take Charge! Planning ahead for surgery can improve your results

By Staff Reports

Monday, June 2, 2008

### What you should know

For most surgery, you have time to learn which treatment and providers are good for you. You also have time to prepare for surgery with the help of a surgeon. If you are informed about treatment options, you can work better with your doctors to make the right decisions. Most surgery is not emergency surgery.

Surgery can be a wonderful solution to a problem. Surgery can often remove or fix a problem or relieve pain.

Surgery has risks. Surgery might fix one problem but lead to another problem. Being realistic about the risks can lead to better treatment decisions. Complications can include infections, bleeding, scarring, pain, blood clots, swelling or loss of strength or ability to move freely. Some people have a bad reaction to anesthesia.

Surgery is not always the best solution to a problem. Often exercise, physical therapy, rest, medicine, weight loss or other treatment can reduce a problem. Chemotherapy and radiation can treat many tumors. Another alternative is called "watchful waiting" to see if a problem gets better or worse over time. Surgery might be delayed or avoided.

The decision to have surgery is a very important decision. Shop to get the best care.

Your doctors should welcome questions. Well-informed patients tend to be happier with their results.

Even if insurance covers your procedure, it might not cover the services of a specific surgeon or hospital.

If you have surgery in a hospital, you will probably get bills from other doctors or providers. These can include anesthesiologists and doctors who advised your surgeon or provided care to you.

### What you should do:

Take an active role in all of the decisions made about your care. Learn if surgery is the best treatment and how it will be done. In many cases, there is more than one way to

solve a problem or improve a condition.

Find out how effective a proposed surgery is likely to be for your condition. An operation might be better for some conditions than for others. For example, arthroscopic surgery can be very helpful for repairing serious tears of the cartilage that lines the knee joint but ineffective for knee arthritis.

Spend as much or more time deciding about surgery as you would for other long-term commitments (for example, a new house, mortgage, or a baby.)

Do your homework to select your doctors and hospital or surgery center. Ask your primary care doctor for advice about the proposed surgery and names of good surgeons. Check surgeon qualifications. It is best to select a surgeon who is ABMS board certified (American Board of Medical Specialties) and specially trained in the procedure. If a surgeon has FACS (Fellow of the American College of Surgeons) after his or her name, the doctor has passed review by other surgeons with similar surgery skills.

Check if the surgeon has privileges to do the surgery procedure in a major local hospital. Be wary of a surgeon who does surgery only in an office, and does not have surgery privileges at a major local hospital.

Learn about financial issues related to a procedure. How much will the surgery cost? How much will your insurance cover? Call your insurance company before your operation to learn how much out-of-pocket cost you will have. Find out whether insurance covers the services of your chosen surgeon and the hospital or surgery center to be used.

Get a second opinion. Your primary care doctor, surgeon, health plan or local medical society can help you find someone to give a second opinion. Check if your health plan will cover the expense of a second opinion.

Be sure you are healthy enough for surgery. If you have other medical problems, you could be at more risk.

Since no surgery is risk free, learn about the possible benefits and risks of the surgery you are about to have. Find out how long the benefits of surgery will last. Sometimes a second operation is needed later.

Before having surgery, ask your physician these questions:

1. What operation are you recommending? Why do I need the operation?
2. Are there other options besides surgery?
3. What are the benefits of having the operation? What are the risks of having the operation?

4. What will happen if I don't have this operation? Can I wait for surgery? Can I wait too long?
5. Where can I get a second opinion?

When planning for surgery, ask your surgeon:

1. What is your experience in doing the operation? Will you be the surgeon or will an assistant do the surgery?
2. Where will the operation be done, that is, which hospital or surgery center)?
3. What kind of anesthesia will I need? General anesthesia ("asleep") or local (just in the area of the surgery)?
4. How long will it take me to recover?
5. Will the surgery be laparoscopic (using small openings for an instrument instead of larger cuts through tissue)?
6. How much will the operation cost?

Ask the surgeon to use a marking pen on you skin the day of your surgery to show where they will operate. This helps to prevent surgery on the wrong part of your body.

#### **For more information**

Go to [healthymemphis.org/links](http://healthymemphis.org/links) for more information about decision making before surgery.

Family Health ...Take Charge! is provided by the Healthy Memphis Common Table: [healthymemphis.org](http://healthymemphis.org). This article supports the care and advice of your doctor. Talk to your care provider about any health condition or before starting new treatments.



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## Online Physician Ratings: Proceed with Caution Leading Physician Certification Organization Offers Consumers Tips for Using Doctor Rating Sites

*Online physician ratings allow patients to publicly and anonymously critique their doctors, providing one of the newest tools available to consumers seeking information to help them select a doctor. But can these online physician ratings be trusted? Experts from the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) say that online ratings can be one useful tool, but caution consumers against relying solely on anonymous ratings.*

Evanston, Ill. (PRWEB) June 12, 2008 -- Online physician ratings allow patients to publicly and anonymously critique their doctors, providing one of the newest tools available to consumers seeking information to help them select a doctor. But can these online physician ratings be trusted? Experts from the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) say that online ratings can be one useful tool, but caution consumers against relying solely on anonymous ratings.

"Online physician ratings can be helpful, but they don't provide a complete picture of a physician's qualifications and, because they reflect a patient's personal experience, they're likely to have a bias," said ABMS president and CEO Kevin Weiss, MD. "Consumers who use online rating systems and other Internet sources for healthcare information should always check to see where the information comes from and how often it is updated. The more consumers know about the source, the better they can assess the information's value and reliability alongside information from other sources."

For 75 years, ABMS, which oversees 24 Member Boards that certify physicians in more than 145 specialties and subspecialties, has been a reliable and trusted resource for consumers seeking information on physician qualifications.

"Many Web sites that allow consumers to search by medical specialty or by a specific health condition don't always have the most current information about board certification," Dr. Weiss said. To access the most up-to-date information on certification status, consumers should check [www.abms.org](http://www.abms.org) to see if their doctors are board certified by one of the 24 ABMS Member Boards. ABMS Member Board certification is widely recognized in healthcare as the gold standard for judging a physician's knowledge, experience and skills within a medical specialty.

In addition, ABMS offers the following tips to help consumers assess and make the best use of online ratings resources:

- Confirm the information. Many Web sites include self-reported physician information. A doctor may list a specialty but that doesn't guarantee that he/she is board certified in that particular area of medicine. Check with ABMS to verify specialty certification.
- Search for online physician ratings that permit a "360 degree evaluation," which allows consumers to read comments on an individual physician from a variety of sources, including other doctors, nurses and patients.
- Be aware that many online physician ratings do not consistently moderate content or review comments prior to posting. This means individuals can post negative or glowing comments about a doctor they've never even seen.
- When choosing a doctor, consider several sources of information rather than relying solely on a doctor rating Web site.
- For a small fee, consumers can also check for disciplinary actions against individual physicians through the Federation of State Medical Boards at [www.fsmb.org](http://www.fsmb.org).

### About ABMS

Now in its 75th year, American Board of Medical Specialties is the preeminent medical organization overseeing physician certification in the United States. It assists its 24 Member Boards in their efforts to develop and implement educational and professional standards for the evaluation and certification of physician specialists. ABMS Member Boards provide physician certification information to ABMS for its certification verification service programs. ABMS is recognized by the key healthcare credentialing accreditation entities as a primary equivalent source of board certification data for medical specialists. Patients can visit [www.abms.org](http://www.abms.org) or call toll-free 1-866-ASK-ABMS to see if their physician is board certified by an ABMS Member Board. For more information about ABMS visit [www.abms.org](http://www.abms.org) or call (847) 491-9091.

The 24 Member Boards that make up the ABMS Board Enterprise covers over 145 medical specialties and subspecialties include: American Board of Allergy and Immunology, American Board of Anesthesiology, American Board of Colon and Rectal Surgery, American Board of Dermatology, American Board of Emergency Medicine, American Board of Family Medicine, American Board of Internal Medicine, American Board of Medical Genetics, American Board of Neurological Surgery, American Board of Nuclear Medicine, American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology, American Board of Ophthalmology, American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery, American Board of Otolaryngology, American Board of Pathology, American Board of Pediatrics American Board of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, American Board of Plastic Surgery, American Board of Preventive Medicine, American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology, American Board of Radiology, American Board of Surgery, American Board of Thoracic Surgery, and American Board of Urology.

From HealthNewsDigest.com

Patient Issues

Online Physician Ratings: Proceed with Caution

By

Jun 15, 2008 - 8:58:23 AM

Leading Physician Certification Organization Offers Consumers Tips for Using Doctor Rating Sites



(HealthNewsDigest.com) - Evanston, Ill. – June 11, 2008 – Online physician ratings allow patients to publicly and anonymously critique their doctors, providing one of the newest tools available to consumers seeking information to help them select a doctor. But can these online

physician ratings be trusted? Experts from the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) say that online ratings can be one useful tool, but caution consumers against relying solely on anonymous ratings.

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- When choosing a doctor, consider several sources of information rather than relying solely on a doctor rating Web site.
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[www.HealthNewsDigest.com](http://www.HealthNewsDigest.com)

[http://www.healthnewsdigest.com/news/Patient\\_230/Online\\_Physician\\_Ratings\\_Proceed\\_with\\_Caution\\_pr...](http://www.healthnewsdigest.com/news/Patient_230/Online_Physician_Ratings_Proceed_with_Caution_pr...) 7/1/2008

# Courant.com

## Rating Doctors' Competency

### No-Holds-Barred Websites Post Sometimes-Blistering Feedback On Patients' Medical Care

By SHARI ROAN

Los Angeles Times

June 23, 2008

Distraught over the results of cosmetic surgery on her nose, Katherine Chen did what many people do when they're unhappy with a doctor. She consulted a malpractice lawyer and filed a complaint with the Medical Board of California.

But the 22-year-old college student from West Covina, Calif., didn't stop there. Chen logged onto her home computer and wrote a tearful review about her experience, posting it to a website that encourages consumers to rate their health-care providers.

"I wasn't nasty about it," says Chen. "But I posted a comment about what I went through. These websites are useful. Doctors still have a lot of power."

Chen and other consumers are trying to rein in that power. They're saying what they think about the current state of health care and the doctors who provide it. Dozens of websites that permit people to rate, review, spin or flame their doctors have sprung up in the last year, operating in much the same way as online services that help people find hotels or plumbers.

Patients and site operators say the trend is good for consumers and good for health care. Thoughtful doctors, they say, will provide better customer service because of the feedback, and the bad ones will no longer be able to hide. And, they add, why should doctors be immune from the trend toward better customer service?

Many physicians say the reviews on RateMDs.com, Vitals.com, DrScore.com and other sites are skewed by disgruntled patients and are unfair, pushing some doctors to near-ruin after a single post.

"These sites don't yield enough power yet to get bad doctors to change. And in the meantime, they may hurt good doctors," says Dr. Phyllis Hollenbeck, a Washington, D.C., family physician and author of "Sacred Trust: The Ten Rules of Life, Death and Medicine," a new book promoting patient empowerment. "It only takes one or two scathing comments and a doctor is put in a terrible position."

The sites, more than two dozen, vary in their scope of information and efforts to be fair. But the trend is toward free, anonymous, no-holds-barred forums.

Some sites have grown out of existing ratings services. Five years after he started the hugely popular RateMyProfessors.com, John Swapceinski and his business partner launched RateMDs in 2004.

"You can find ratings on cars and flat-screen TVs, but it's hard to rate professional services," he says. "I think that's



overlooked."

Angie's List, a membership-based service that allows consumers to rate service providers, added health-care services in March.

The operators of Vitals.com, which launched in January, say their goal is to provide people with free, fair and balanced information to help them select a doctor.

"We think of it as something closer to Match.com, in which we want to match up patients with doctors who are right for them," says Mitchel Rothschild, chief executive of the Lyndhurst, N.J., company.

The restaurant survey company Zagat has even teamed up with the health benefits company Wellpoint Inc., parent company of Anthem Blue Cross, to provide Blue Cross members with an online tool to evaluate doctors. The service allows members to issue scores based on trust, communication, availability and environment.

"Consumers can pretty much go on the Web and get information on anything, from what is a better shampoo to what is a better airline," says Dr. Zeinab Dabbah, chief medical officer of Anthem Blue Cross.

Sharing information via the Web has given consumers a powerful tool.

But viewing a doctor the same way as a product represents a dramatic shift. Once reverential of doctors, many U.S. consumers are more comfortable criticizing physicians, says Dr. Kevin Weiss, president of the American Board of Medical Specialties, an organization that sets performance standards and certifies doctors.

"There is a lot of pent-up frustration," Weiss says. "Costs are going up, and people are paying more out of pocket. Plus, there is a lot of data now on how the health-care system needs to do better in terms of quality and safety."

The tradition of doctors monitoring their own conduct through state medical boards and peer organizations is failing, Swapceinski says.

"There is a lot of protection for doctors," he says. "Even with the state medical boards there is recognition that doctors policing doctors is not the best way to handle things. Most complaints about doctors are never made public."

## No Red Flags

Chen says she did her homework — checking the doctor's credentials and history of malpractice lawsuits and studying his website — before the surgery last year to shorten her long nose.

"It was minor," she says. "I actually shouldn't have done anything, but I wanted to be perfect."

She found no red flags in the surgeon's background. The results of the operation, however, horrified her.

"I started crying. I didn't recognize myself. ... I spent the next nine months at home. I was embarrassed to go out. I quit my job and dropped out of school."

Chen says her nose was crooked and much too short, and that she was left with breathing problems and nosebleeds. She filed a complaint with the Medical Board of California, a process she later abandoned, and consulted a lawyer who discouraged her from filing a lawsuit because of the cost. She was also facing surgery to correct her nose. Ultimately, Chen says, she felt exposing the doctor on the Internet was her only recourse.

Later, pleased with her revision surgery, Chen also used a ratings website to write favorably about the doctor who performed it.

"I wanted people to know about my experience with him because he didn't really have any feedback on the site," she says.

Some state medical boards provide consumers with limited information on doctors, such as any disciplinary actions recorded and whether their licenses are current. The Connecticut Department of Public Health publishes a physician profile on its website ([www.ct.gov/dph](http://www.ct.gov/dph)). The profile includes information about the doctor's training and whether any disciplinary actions or malpractice suits have been filed against them.

Moreover, state governments, insurance companies and private organizations have attempted in recent years to gather data on physician performance that can be compiled into "report cards" to help consumers choose doctors wisely. Such measures have been shown to improve health-care quality, according to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. But those tools are in their early stages and are rarely consumer-friendly or easy to locate.

Dr. Richard Fischel, a thoracic surgeon in Orange, says his life was turned upside-down after a patient began posting vicious remarks online regarding a surgery Fischel performed.

The surgery was an elective procedure, Fischel and the patient discussed the pros and cons, and the patient signed a consent form acknowledging that discussion.

The operation went well, Fischel says. But after the surgery, the patient complained about a previously discussed side effect that can sometimes occur as a result of the surgery.

"He decided his life was ruined and destroyed," says Fischel, who graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles, medical school in 1984 and is director of thoracic oncology at Hoag Hospital in Newport Beach.

Online, Fischel says, the patient posted "slanderous rants and raves."

Fischel, who can't reveal details because of a legal agreement he has since reached with the patient, soon discovered the pervasive power of the Internet. His business was affected and he suffered monetary and emotional costs because of the patient's postings. Fischel hired a lawyer and became so depressed he considered leaving medicine.

"Doctors, in general, are sitting ducks," Fischel says. "It's impossible to fight back. The courts make it so you have almost no options."

Federal laws protect patient privacy and prohibit doctors from discussing an individual's health care in public. But the right of patients to criticize their doctors online has been established. Federal law asserts that the hosts of websites consumers use to post anonymous opinions are immune from charges of defamation.

Doctors shouldn't be rated like products or service providers, says Weiss. Medicine involves individual and personalized interactions, and each medical case and doctor-patient relationship is unique.

"With TVs and cars, people can subjectively talk about their experience because you have a consistent product," says Weiss. "But with health care there is so much blended into the experience, it's hard to do an evaluation. You want a doctor who is both technically competent but also one who can communicate and understand the human dimensions beyond the technical aspect of good care."

The operators of RateMds.com read every comment and delete ones that are "blatantly libelous," Swapceinski says.

RateMDs.com attracts 450,000 visitors a month and has 600 to 1,000 new posts a day.

In January, the AMA released a statement urging consumers to ignore anonymous doctor rating sites, saying they "have many shortcomings."

**Courant Staff Writer Hilary Waldman contributed to this story.**

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## Rating doctors online: Hot or not?

(Published: Monday, June 23, 2008  
)

LOS ANGELES - Distraught over the results of cosmetic surgery on her nose, Katherine Chen did what many people do when they're unhappy with a doctor. She consulted a malpractice lawyer and filed a complaint with the Medical Board of California.

But the 22-year-old college student from West Covina didn't stop there. Chen logged onto her home computer and wrote a tearful review about her experience, posting it to a Web site that encourages consumers to rate their health-care providers.

"I wasn't nasty about it," says Chen. "But I posted a comment about what I went through. These Web sites are useful. Doctors still have a lot of power."

Chen and other consumers are trying to rein in that power. They're saying what they think about the current state of health care and, more specifically, the doctors who provide it. Dozens of Web sites that permit people to rate, review, spin or flame their doctors have sprung up in the last year, operating in much the same way as online services that help people find hotels or plumbers.

Patients and site operators say the trend is good for consumers and good for healthcare. Thoughtful doctors, they say, will provide better customer service because of the feedback, and the bad ones will no longer be able to hide. And, they add, why should doctors be immune from the trend toward better customer service?

Many physicians say the reviews on RateMDs.com , Vitals.com, DrScore.com and other sites are skewed by disgruntled patients and are unfair, pushing some doctors to near-ruin after a single post.

"These sites don't yield enough power yet to get bad doctors to change. And in the meantime, they may hurt good doctors," says Dr. Phyllis Hollenbeck, a Washington, D.C., family physician and author of "Sacred Trust: The Ten Rules of Life, Death and Medicine," a new book promoting patient empowerment. "It only takes one or two scathing comments and a doctor is put in a terrible position."

The sites, more than two dozen of them, vary in their scope of information and efforts to be fair. But the trend is toward free, anonymous, no-holds-barred forums.

Some sites have grown out of existing ratings services. Five years after he started the hugely popular RateMyProfessors.com, John Swapceinski and his business partner launched RateMDs in 2004.

"You can find ratings on cars and flat-screen TVs, but it's hard to rate professional services," he says. "I think that's overlooked."

Angie's List, a membership-based service that allows consumers to rate service providers, added health-care services in March.

The operators of Vitals.com, which launched in January, say their goal is to provide people with free, fair and

balanced information to help them select a doctor.

"We think of it as something closer to Match.com, in which we want to match up patients with doctors who are right for them," says Mitchel Rothschild, chief executive of the Lyndhurst company.

The restaurant survey company Zagat has even teamed up with the health benefits company Wellpoint Inc., parent company of Anthem Blue Cross, to provide Blue Cross members with an online tool to evaluate doctors. The service allows members to issue scores based on trust, communication, availability and environment.

"Consumers can pretty much go on the Web and get information on anything, from what is a better shampoo to what is a better airline," says Dr. Zeinab Dabbah, chief medical officer of Anthem Blue Cross. "We're offering this to meet all of the expectations that consumers have about the marketplace."

Sharing information via the Web has given consumers a powerful tool.

But viewing a doctor the same way as a product represents a dramatic shift. Once reverential of doctors, many U.S. consumers are more comfortable criticizing physicians, says Dr. Kevin Weiss, president of the American Board of Medical Specialties, an organization that sets performance standards and certifies doctors.

"There is a lot of pent-up frustration," Weiss says. "Costs are going up, and people are paying more out of pocket. Plus, there is a lot of data now on how the health-care system needs to do better in terms of quality and safety."

The tradition of doctors monitoring their own conduct through state medical boards and peer organizations is failing, Swapceinski says.

"There is a lot of protection for doctors," he says. "Even with the state medical boards there is recognition that doctors policing doctors is not the best way to handle things. Most complaints about doctors are never made public."

Chen says she did her homework - checking the doctor's credentials and history of malpractice lawsuits and studying his website - before the surgery last year to shorten her long nose.

"It was minor," she says. "I actually shouldn't have done anything, but I wanted to be perfect."

She found no red flags in the surgeon's background. The results of the operation, however, horrified her.

"I started crying. I didn't recognize myself ... I spent the next nine months at home. I was embarrassed to go out. I quit my job and dropped out of school."

Chen says her nose was crooked and much too short, and that she was left with breathing problems and nose bleeds. She filed a complaint with the Medical Board of California, a process she later abandoned, and consulted a lawyer who discouraged her from filing a lawsuit because of the cost. She was also facing surgery to correct her nose. Ultimately, Chen says, she felt exposing the doctor on the Internet was her only recourse.

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Some state medical boards provide consumers with limited information on doctors, such as any disciplinary actions recorded and whether their licenses are current. Moreover, state governments, insurance companies and private organizations have attempted in recent years to gather data on physician performance that can be compiled into "report cards" to help consumers choose doctors wisely. Such measures have been shown to improve health-care quality, according to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. But those tools are in

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Federal laws protect patient privacy and prohibit doctors from discussing an individual's health care in public. But the right of patients to criticize their doctors online has been established. Federal law asserts that the hosts of Web sites on which consumers post anonymous opinions are immune from charges of defamation.

The courts have also ruled on specific cases in which the identity of the patient is known. Last year, the California 3rd District Court of Appeal ruled that a UC Davis plastic surgeon could not stop a patient from making negative public comments about him on the Internet because he was a "limited purpose public figure." The court noted that the doctor advertised his practice and had appeared on local television shows.

The case unfolded in 2003 when a Sacramento-area woman, Georgette Gilbert, filed a malpractice lawsuit against Dr. Jonathan Sykes, saying the brow lift he did had left her unable to close one eye fully and with one eyebrow higher than the other, creating a "permanently surprised look" on her face. Gilbert also created a Web site detailing her experience.

Sykes said the results of the surgery were satisfactory and filed a defamation counterclaim, which the 3rd District Court rejected.

"There is a lot of power in the Internet and, in a way, certain doctors have used it to become famous," says Sykes, who is vice president of education for the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery and director of facial, plastic and reconstructive surgery at UC Davis. "But it works in both directions. The Internet has a long voice. Something negative gets perpetuated because the Web site stays up. Good reputations can be tarnished by a sinister person."

Doctors shouldn't be rated like products or service providers, says Weiss. Medicine involves individual and personalized interactions, and each medical case and doctor-patient relationship is unique.

"With TVs and cars, people can subjectively talk about their experience because you have a consistent product," says Weiss. "But with health care there is so much blended into the experience, it's hard to do an evaluation. You want a doctor who is both technically competent but also one who can communicate and understand the human dimensions beyond the technical aspect of good care."

Operators of the Websites say that consumer feedback can improve relations between doctors and patients.

The operators of RateMds.com read every comment and delete ones that are "blatantly libelous," Swapceinski says.

About 5 percent of the posts are taken down. Still, he gets threats from doctors' lawyers "on almost a weekly basis."

Some sites, such as Wellpoint's Zagat, will not post doctor ratings until 10 consumers have weighed in. DrScore.com, founded by a doctor, allows only numerical ratings - no anonymous comments.

However, Swapceinski says running RateMyProfessors.com convinced him that rankings and comments typically bear the ring of truth.

"It's hard to prove it scientifically, but I truly believe that the averages are a reflection of what people think," he says.

RateMDs.com attracts about 450,000 visitors a month and has 600 to 1,000 new posts a day.

But many doctors think the sites are of limited value and that consumers could be as easily led astray as informed by them.

"I wish I could say that this kind of forum will motivate the doctors who are jerks to change," Hollenbeck says. "But what you see is an awful lot of baloney on these sites, a lot of unedited venting. Feedback would be more useful when it tries to say what works and what doesn't work."

Physician organizations support evaluating doctors with empirical measures and making the information public - as long as it's fair, says Dr. Nancy H. Nielsen, president-elect of the American Medical Association.

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## News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Organized Physician Certification Celebrates Major Milestone

*ABMS Traces Beginnings of Specialty Board Movement and Board Certification on its Web site and Renews its Public Commitment to Ensuring Quality of Care*

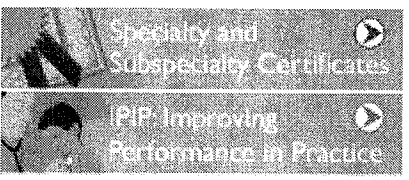
**EVANSTON, Ill. - June 11, 2008** -American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS), the organization that oversees the board certification process of specialty physicians in the United States, is observing 75 years of public service by reflecting on the significance of the specialty board movement and the board certification system in public medicine and renewing its public commitment to provide meaningful information about a physician's board certification. The organization was formed on this date in 1933.

A commemorative section on the ABMS Web site recalls the lessons and legacies of the specialty board movement and honors the men and women who dedicate themselves to the practice of specialty medicine. The special anniversary section found at [www.abms.org/ABMS\\_75th](http://www.abms.org/ABMS_75th) looks back on the beginning of the specialty board movement and includes retrospectives on the organization, the leadership and the advancements in physician certification. In addition, resources, tips and information are provided to educate everyone about board certification and its importance in physician selection and provision of care.

ABMS was born out of public outcry for higher quality care. In the early 1900s, there was a clear need to establish a system to assure the public that physician specialists were properly trained and that they continued to stay abreast of new practices and treatments to improve the quality of care delivered. To do this, standards for physician education and evaluation had to be established, and a national system had to be created to enforce the standards, also making it possible to readily identify qualified physician specialists. To this day, ABMS and its Member Boards have been a leading and trusted resource for consumers and healthcare professionals seeking information on physician qualifications. Through ABMS the nation's leaders in specialty medicine convene to continually examine the relationship between physician performance assessment and public accountability. ABMS recently

### Hot Topics

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- Physician Certification Celebrates Major Milestone
- ABMS Assembly Votes in Favor of Three-Year Initiative to Enhance Public Trust
- ABMS Featured on KGIL Talk Radio 1260 am
- Joel A. DeLisa, MD, MS to Chair ABMS Board of Directors
- 2008 Guide to Physician Specialties Now Available
- Before You Say Yes to a Medical Procedure...
- Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois to Offer ABMS® Patient Safety Improvement Program to Network Physicians



announced approval of a new initiative designed for the public to enhance physician performance assessment. Called the *ABMS 2008-2011 Enhanced Public Trust Initiative*, its goal is to boost the ABMS Board Enterprise's role as a trusted private sector agent when it comes to physician accountability and to expand resource offerings for the public's need.

"A major anniversary is an appropriate occasion to reflect on an organization's role and accomplishments, and how much things may have changed as a consequence of its existence," said Kevin B. Weiss, MD, ABMS President and CEO. "For more than three-quarters of a century the board certification process, as carried out by the ABMS certifying boards, has served as the primary mechanism by which physicians voluntarily commit to being evaluated for recognition of competence in their chosen specialty and/or subspecialty of medicine. ABMS has consistently acted in the public trust not only as unprecedented leader in professional self-regulation but also as the primary source for information confirming physicians' board certification."

The 24 boards which make up ABMS issue certification in more than 145 specialties and subspecialties. More than 700,000 physicians are certified by one or more ABMS Member Board.

The establishment of ABMS was a turning point for what was once something that people couldn't validate. It provided definitive evidence of a physician's qualifications. ABMS will continue to lead the way toward the highest standards of professionalism, education, integrity and excellence in patient care.

"ABMS has accomplished much since its organization. We owe our success to that first group of dedicated physician visionaries who devoted their efforts and talents to advance the specialty board movement and create what is today ABMS," remarked ABMS Chair Joel A. DeLisa, MD. "Out of their strong incentives to establish a proper system for recognizing specialty medicine practitioners comes our sense of responsibility to ensure the continued competence of physician specialists for the benefit of our nation's medical consumers."

### **About ABMS**

Now in its 75th year, American Board of Medical Specialties is the pre-eminent medical organization overseeing physician certification in the United States. It assists its 24 Member Boards in their efforts to develop and implement educational and professional standards for the evaluation and certification of physician specialists. ABMS Member Boards provide physician certification information to ABMS for its certification verification service programs. ABMS is recognized by the key healthcare credentialing accreditation entities as a primary equivalent source of board certification data for medical specialists. Patients can visit [www.abms.org](http://www.abms.org) or call toll-free 1-866-ASK-ABMS to see if their physician is board certified by an ABMS Member Board. For more information about ABMS visit [www.abms.org](http://www.abms.org) or call (847) 491-9091.

The 24 Member Boards that make up the ABMS Board Enterprise covers over 145 medical specialties and subspecialties include: American Board of Allergy and Immunology, American Board of Anesthesiology, American Board of Colon and Rectal Surgery, American Board of Dermatology, American Board of Emergency Medicine, American Board of Family Medicine, American Board of Internal Medicine, American Board of Medical Genetics, American Board of Neurological Surgery, American Board of Nuclear Medicine, American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology, American Board of Ophthalmology, American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery, American Board of Otolaryngology, American Board of Pathology, American Board of Pediatrics American Board of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, American Board of Plastic Surgery, American Board of Preventive Medicine, American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology, American Board of Radiology, American Board of Surgery, American Board of Thoracic Surgery, and American Board of Urology.

#### **About the ABMS Research and Education Foundation**

Established in 1971, American Board of Medical Specialties Research and Education Foundation is a not-for profit charitable organization affiliated with the American Board of Medical Specialties. Its mission is to support the scientific, scholarly and public education mission, purposes and goals of ABMS to improve healthcare quality. This involves actively initiating, engaging in, convening and supporting activities with other organizations concerned with the quality of physicians and medical care and with the development of professional and educational standards for certifying physician specialists. The Foundation offers program management, education and research capabilities and services. For more information, visit [www.abms.org](http://www.abms.org) or call (847) 491-9091.



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**News Release**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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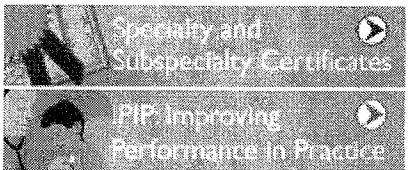
*Leading Physician Certification Organization Offers Consumers Tips for Using Doctor Rating Sites*

**Evanston, Ill. – June 11, 2008** – Online physician ratings allow patients to publicly and anonymously critique their doctors, providing one of the newest tools available to consumers seeking information to help them select a doctor. But can these online physician ratings be trusted? Experts from the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) say that online ratings can be one useful tool, but caution consumers against relying solely on anonymous ratings.

“Online physician ratings can be helpful, but they don’t provide a complete picture of a physician’s qualifications and, because they reflect a patient’s personal experience, they’re likely to have a bias,” said ABMS president and CEO Kevin Weiss, MD. “Consumers who use online rating systems and other Internet sources for healthcare information should always check to see where the information comes from and how often it is updated. The more consumers know about the source, the better they can assess the information’s value and reliability alongside information from other sources.”

For 75 years, ABMS, which oversees 24 Member Boards that certify physicians in more than 145 specialties and subspecialties, has been a reliable and trusted resource for consumers seeking information on physician qualifications.

“Many Web sites that allow consumers to search by medical specialty or by a specific health condition don’t always have the most current information about board certification,” Dr. Weiss said. To access the most up-to-date information on certification status, consumers should check [www.abms.org](http://www.abms.org) to see if their doctors are board certified by one of the 24 ABMS Member Boards. ABMS Member Board certification is widely recognized in healthcare as the gold standard for judging a physician’s knowledge, experience and skills within a medical specialty.



In addition, ABMS offers the following tips to help consumers assess and make the best use of online ratings resources:

- Confirm the information. Many Web sites include self-reported physician information. A doctor may list a specialty but that doesn't guarantee that he/she is board certified in that particular area of medicine. Check with ABMS to verify specialty certification.
- Search for online physician ratings that permit a "360 degree evaluation," which allows consumers to read comments on an individual physician from a variety of sources, including other doctors, nurses and patients.
- Be aware that many online physician ratings do not consistently moderate content or review comments prior to posting. This means individuals can post negative or glowing comments about a doctor they've never even seen.
- When choosing a doctor, consider several sources of information rather than relying solely on a doctor rating Web site.
- For a small fee, consumers can also check for disciplinary actions against individual physicians through the Federation of State Medical Boards at [www.fsmb.org](http://www.fsmb.org).

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