

# Today's Black Woman

MARCH 2008

feature | story

## Death Of Donda

BY STAFF WRITER



PHOTO: CHRIS FARINA CORBIS

# West

## Sparks A New Look At Cosmetic Surgery

An inspiring woman who has left a living legacy behind in the person of her son, Kanye West, Donda West was a respected educator, scholar, author, and business woman who also acted as co-manager of her son's career, and was the chief executive of his business parent company, West Brands. Her death, at the age of 58, reportedly from complications caused by cosmetic surgery, has caused many people to take a harder look at these procedures.

**A**long with the unfortunate death last year of Donda West, there are numerous other horror stories about cosmetic surgery's uglier side which continue to surface.

One New York woman tells of her ordeal after undergoing surgery for a facelift and eyelid tuck at the hands of a physician who was board-certified in plastic surgery. She was unaware, however, that the doctor was not experienced in the type of facelift surgery she needed. He had only observed that type of facelift surgery being done days earlier at a weekend seminar, she indicates. Her results were devastating.

According to the woman, the doctor severed a key facial nerve, and totally destroyed her eyelids and small tear ducts, impairing her cornea. After an additional eight surgeries, says the woman, she is, in essence, going blind. She sued for negligence and settled out of court for \$1.4 million.

Besides a physician's board certification status in plastic surgery, there are many other variables that may make a doctor not the best choice for a particular cosmetic surgery procedure (any procedure, for that matter). Consultants on cosmetic surgery procedures recommend that people considering cosmetic surgery do extensive research, shop around, and ask plenty of questions before they decide on a particular physician. They urge people to educate themselves about these medical procedures and do an extensive check on the doctor's background.

### BEFORE YOU SAY YES TO COSMETIC SURGERY...

Below, Dr. Stephen Miller, president and CEO of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS), answers a few questions about consumers checking the qualifications of a physician prior to making a decision to undergo cosmetic surgery.

**How should someone who is considering cosmetic surgery go about finding a reputable, board-certified physician, in terms of criteria the doctor should meet**

### to make his board certification relevant to the individual seeking this information?

If a doctor says, "I'm board certified," your next questions should be "By what board?" and "In what specialty?" Someone considering cosmetic surgery should first determine that the doctor is certified by one of the member boards of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS). Then, find out if it's the right specialty board—one that encompasses the training and evaluation for the procedure being considered. For example, for eyelid surgery, a patient might choose a doctor certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery, American Board of Otolaryngology or American Board of Ophthalmology. For breast surgery or a tummy tuck, patients should look for a doctor certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery.

The American Board of Medical Specialties oversees these and 21 other medical specialty boards and sets the standards to evaluate and certify physicians. Patients can check, free of charge, if a physician is ABMS Member Board certified in a particular specialty by visiting [www.abms.org](http://www.abms.org) or calling 866-ASK-ABMS.

Even if a doctor is certified in the right specialty, the procedure being considered may be one he or she performs only occasionally, so ask how many times the doctor has performed the procedure in the past three, six or 12 months. Ask to see before-and-after photos and ask for contact information of patients who had the procedure. Ask about potential risks, recovery time, and possible complications, and how they would be handled.

### Besides board certification, what other medical credentials should a cosmetic surgery candidate insist that a physician have?

In addition to board certification by an appropriate ABMS Member Board, doctors should have hospital or ambulatory surgery privileges, malpractice insurance or its equivalent, and a medical license. If the doctor operates in an ambulatory surgery unit, patients should make sure it is accredited by a national or state organization, which is generally recognized and accepted by The Joint Commission, Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care, American Association for Accreditation of Ambulatory Surgery Facilities or Inpatient Quality Indicator.

### How can someone find out if a cosmetic surgeon has malpractice lawsuits against him or her?

Unfortunately, most states do not make malpractice lawsuit information public. The best way to find out is to ask the doctor directly. You can check with the Federation of State Medical Boards at [www.fsmb.org](http://www.fsmb.org) to learn if a physician has been disciplined or had his or her license suspended or revoked. ■

# Today's Black Woman

M A R C H 2 0 0 8

## Choosing Your Doctor

**I**t is most important when choosing a doctor that you have someone who, aside from having compassion, etc., is skilled and has the necessary certification.

The American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) is encouraging young women to choose their doctor, not only by location or convenient office hours, but also by checking their certification status with the ABMS.

This organization oversees physician certification. On their Web site, consumers can check to see if their doctor is board certified and what board certification means, along with tips on how to be a smarter patient. Log onto [www.abms.org](http://www.abms.org) or call 866ASK-ABMS. ■