

Understanding Your Provider's Qualifications

When choosing a provider at a medical spa, it's important to understand their qualifications and level of expertise.

Start by confirming that the provider holds a valid state license for their specific role, whether they are a physician, nurse practitioner, registered nurse, licensed aesthetician, or technician. For physicians, look for board certification from a recognized and reputable certifying specialty board, as this indicates they've met high standards for education, training, and ongoing professional development. The member boards of the American Board of Medical Specialties and the American Osteopathic Association are considered the gold standard board for their specialties.

It's also important that providers have specialized training in the specific procedures they perform. For physicians, this typically means completing residency training in plastic surgery, dermatology, or otolaryngology, as these specialties include cosmetic treatments commonly offered in med spas. You can often find this information online or simply ask the physician about their training. Any reputable doctor will be happy to explain their background.

For non-physician providers – who should be acting under the supervision of a physician, such as nurses or physician assistants – look for experience with high volumes of the procedures they perform, as well as certifications in areas like cosmetic injectables (e.g., botulinum toxin neuromodulators and dermal fillers) or non-invasive body contouring.

To help you better understand the different types of medical professionals you might encounter at a med spa, the next section includes a simple guide to common provider credentials and what they mean.

Med Spa Provider Breakdown



Plastic Surgeon

Who They Are: Plastic surgeons are highly-trained physicians who specialize in enhancing the face and body through surgical and non-surgical procedures. Plastic surgeons have the expertise to perform a full range of aesthetic and reconstructive procedures, from head to toe, with medical precision and artistry.

Education: A plastic surgeon completes extensive medical training, beginning with four years of medical school to earn a Doctor of Medicine (MD) or Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO) degree. Next, they undergo a plastic surgery residency program lasting five or more years, which includes comprehensive training in general surgery and specialized plastic surgery. Some plastic surgeons choose to further refine their expertise by completing a fellowship in areas such as aesthetic surgery, craniofacial surgery, or hand surgery.

Board Certification: Plastic surgeons will have completed an ACGME-accredited plastic surgery residency. Many will be board-certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery (ABPS), a certification that reflects their commitment to the highest standards of safety, ethics, and expertise. Ongoing recertification ensures they remain current with advancements in aesthetic procedures and continue to deliver high-quality patient care.

Facial Plastic Surgeon

Who They Are: Facial plastic surgeons are physicians who focus exclusively on surgical and non-surgical procedures involving the face, head, and neck.

Education: A facial plastic surgeon completes four years of medical school to earn a Doctor of Medicine (MD) or Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO) degree, followed by a residency in otolaryngology-head and neck surgery. Many facial plastic surgeons pursue additional fellowship training in facial plastic and reconstructive surgery. Their training is focused exclusively on the anatomy, aesthetics, and procedures of the face, head, and neck.

Board Certification: Many facial plastic surgeons are certified by the American Board of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery (ABFPRS), a recognized board that reflects their specialized training. All ABFPRS members have prior certification by the American Board of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery (ABOHNS) or the American Board of Plastic Surgery (ABPS). Facial plastic surgeons who are ABPS members have training and certification that meet the full criteria outlined in the Plastic Surgeon section.

Med Spa Provider Breakdown



Dermatologist

Who They Are: Dermatologists are physicians who specialize in diagnosing, treating, and preventing conditions affecting the skin, hair, and nails. In addition to medical dermatology, some dermatologists specialize in cosmetic procedures, offering treatments like Botox, dermal fillers, laser therapies, and chemical peels.

Education: A dermatologist completes four years of medical school, where they earn a Doctor of Medicine (MD) or Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO) degree. They complete a one-year internship, typically in internal medicine or general surgery, followed by a three-year dermatology residency. While dermatology is not a surgical specialty, some dermatologists have further training in surgical dermatology and Mohs surgery.

Board Certification: Many dermatologists are board certified by the American Board of Dermatology (ABD).

Nurse Practitioner (NP) and Registered Nurse (RN)

Who They Are: Nurse Practitioners (NPs) and Registered Nurses (RNs) are healthcare professionals who provide non-surgical procedures in a medical spa setting. With specialized training, they perform wellness treatments, promote skin health, and enhance aesthetic appearance.

Education: Registered nurses (RN) earn either an Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) or a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN). To become an NP, the RN then completes the National Council Licensure Examination, obtains an RN license from the state's Board of Nursing, gains relevant clinical experience, and then earns a Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) or a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree.

Board Certification: Both RNs and NPs should be licensed by the relevant state's Board of Nursing. An NP may be certified by a recognized board, such as the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) or the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners Certification Board (AANPCB). While certification is not mandatory for RNs, many pursue additional certifications in minimally invasive cosmetic procedures through accredited or non-accredited training programs.

Med Spa Provider Breakdown

Licensed Aesthetician

Who They Are: Licensed aestheticians are skincare professionals trained to provide non-medical cosmetic treatments that enhance the appearance and health of the skin. They perform services such as facials, microdermabrasion, waxing, and eyebrow shaping, as well as offering advice on skincare products and routines.

Education: Aestheticians are typically trained in cosmetology schools and must pass a state exam to obtain their license. They receive no medical training.

Board Certification: Licensed aestheticians are not typically required to have board certification, but they do often have specialized certifications in particular procedures.

Technician

Who They Are: Technicians in a medical spa setting are trained professionals who perform a variety of non-invasive aesthetic treatments under the supervision of medical practitioners. They specialize in services such as skin resurfacing, body contouring, and other therapies that enhance skin appearance and overall wellness.

Education: Technicians in a medical spa setting typically have gone through cosmetology school. Technicians often pursue specialized training and certifications in specific procedures like body contouring and microdermabrasion, which may require attending accredited courses or workshops. They receive no medical training.

Board Certification: N/A