

What's in a name?

By Joseph Magnant, M.D.

spe-cial-ist

Pronunciation: _spe-sh(-)list\
Function: noun
Date: 1855

1: one who specializes in a particular occupation, practice, or branch of learning

In this day of advances in medical treatments with improvement and refinement in technology, patients have unlimited access to health related information in print media, television networks and through the internet. Although the information that is there for the general public appears to be virtually unlimited, with access to educational and procedural videos, web lectures and galleries of pre and post procedure photos, patients often may find themselves lost in the maze of choices of providers. The question of who the best or most well trained physician to see for Botox, facelifts, foot surgery, vein procedures, or a host of other clinical entities which might be taken care of by a variety of differently trained physicians has become a more challenging one. Advancements in medical technology have resulted in a natural migration of physicians to greater specialization within their areas of training to keep abreast of the most modern treatment technologies.

Online resources are available not only for patient educational materials but also for the research of credentials and training background of potential medical providers. A good starting place when researching specialty providers is their practice website, it's depth of content as well as the completeness of their training record are important aspects to review. Try to determine what percentage of the practice is dedicated to their area of specialty training and whether this is what you are specifically interested in. Is the physician completely dedicated to the area you are interested in? Are they specifically trained in this area and what sort of documentation can they provide to verify their dedication and interest in quality of care and patient outcomes? Feel free to ask for and expect open answers to your questions about the insurance companies with which the practitioner is "in-network" and if your planned



procedure will be considered medically necessary. Established patient references may be supportive, but HIPAA compliance regulations make obtaining personal references, other than written or video patient testimonials, difficult. Primary care physician references, even from physicians other than your own, such as your friends' primary care physician may prove helpful in making the right decision, as physicians have much broader exposure to patients with problems similar to yours. One other and perhaps the most important determining piece of homework is the free in-office screening. So if the opportunity presents itself, take full advantage of it. At the very least you get the chance to kick the tires of the practice, so to speak. Meet the doctor and staff, gather information regarding the treatments they offer and any literature regarding the physician's training. Check out the cleanliness of the facility and, at the minimum, leave with an overall impression of the office, whether positive, neutral or negative. Any other information you glean while at the screening regarding your specific condition and the treatment options available should be considered a bonus.

In summary, do your homework when choosing a medical specialist professional. Dedicate at least as much time to making this decision as you do when you make a major decision like an auto or home purchase. You should expect a high level of specialization and dedication, professionalism and personal care from your health care specialist and their staff. Their training credentials and practice focus should be readily available and transparent. Full financial disclosure and honest answers to your questions regarding network status with your provider should be offered upfront, either on the website or in the form of a printed financial disclosure policy of the practice. If you meet a roadblock

when making these types of inquiries, consider this a red flag. If you have internet access the network status can also be easily verified on your carrier's provider site. The last and probably most important piece of data which should be considered is peer, physician and word of mouth referral. These are powerful tools and will provide you with an added measure of reassurance that you have made the correct decision. Our community is more interconnected than we fully appreciate and a single inquiry will often lead to a network of referral opinions and experiences. The answer to the question "what would you do if this was your mother or wife?" should be an easy question for your specialist to answer, while looking at you sincerely in the eyes. "The same thing as I am suggesting to you, under similar clinical circumstances".

About Dr. Magnant

Dr. Joseph Magnant earned his Doctorate in Medicine and performed his General Surgery residency at the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond, Virginia. He completed his Vascular Surgery fellowship at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center in Hanover, New Hampshire and is certified by the American Board of Surgery in Vascular Surgery. He is an active member of the Society for Vascular Surgery, the American College of Phlebology, the Southern Association for Vascular Surgery and is also a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons. He practiced arterial and venous vascular surgery as part of a large multi specialty group for 14 years after he completed his fellowship in vascular surgery. He decided to further focus and limit his practice to venous diseases in 2005 and opened the doors of Vein Specialists in June 2006.



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