

Healthcare Communication Review

Volume 4 Number 1

Online Edition

Winter/Spring 2004

Information Resources: On Physicians and Hospitals

By Judith A. Greenfield, PhD, RN

© 2004 Healthcare Communication Project, Inc. All Rights Reserved

Physicians

General Information

What medical schools did doctors go to? Where did they do their clinical training? Do they offer translation services? Where are their practices located? What medical plans do they accept? Answers to some of these and other questions may be found from a variety of sources. Where answers can be found, it's important to read the disclaimers of the organizations providing public access to this information. In many cases, background information is provided by the physicians, themselves.

You can begin your search for answers by going directly to the source – the doctors. Many of them will welcome your inquiry. You can also turn to the Department of Health (DOH) in the state where the doctor is practicing. Not all states offer such information to the general public, but [New York](#) does. If you don't know the web address of other state's health agencies, you should be able to find their sites by using an Internet search engine such as Google. For information about doctors, nationwide, you can turn to the [American Medical Association](#) (AMA). Once at the site, click on 'patient', and follow leads to its Online Doctor Finder pages. If the doctors you are looking for are members of the association, you should be able to find information about them here.

Qualification Information

Is this doctor Board certified? (To be Board certified in a specialty area of medicine, physicians must successfully complete a difficult test after years of residency training in the specialty area.) How many times has this doctor performed your type of surgery? With what success rate? Again, a place to begin when seeking this information is with the doctor in question. If you want to go further, however, some online answers may be found. To confirm certification as a specialist, the [American Board of Medical Specialties](#) offers a doctor verification service. To access this information, you can visit them online (you will be required to register) or call them at **1-800-ASK-ABMS**.

In some instances, the number of surgeries performed by particular doctors in a given year, along with calculations of expected and observed deaths for that surgery, can be found. As with general information, interested parties should check their state health department. Information about cardiac surgery can be found by going to New York State's [Department of Health](#) web site. Once there click on "Info for Consumers," then "Center for Consumer Health Care Information," and then "Cardiac Surgery Reports." Visit [Health Care Choices](#) to find out about numbers of cancer surgeries performed by doctors in a few more states, including New York.

Legal Action Information

What, if any, legal actions have been taken against this doctor? Why were they taken? New York State's Office of Professional Medical Conduct is responsible for protecting the public by investigating charges of professional misconduct on the parts of physicians and physicians' assistants. Information about a variety of legal and disciplinary actions taken against these professionals may also be found by following consumer links on the NYSDOH web site (click on above link). Similar information about doctors throughout the nation is also available, for a modest charge, from the [Public Citizen Health Research Group](#). For more information, click on the link to their site or call 1-800-289-3787.

Hospitals

What is a hospital's accreditation rating? How many surgeries of your type are performed there? Is the hospital identified, by [U.S. News and World Report](#), as one of America's Best Hospitals? To find out, visit their site, click on "Health" and follow links to a variety of reports on their "Best Hospitals" project. Accreditation reports for individual hospitals are published for public viewing by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations' ([JCAHO](#) – pronounced jay-co) To see them, go to their site, click on "General Public" and look for "Quality Check." Numbers of cancer surgeries performed at individual hospitals in seven states (including New York) can also be found at [Health Care Choices](#). While there are still gaps in information available to the general public, much can still be found. Searching these sites will likely lead you to other sources of information as well.□

Judith A. Greenfield is contributing editor of the *Healthcare Communication Review* and President of the Healthcare Communication Project, Inc.

[Click here](#) for your free subscription to the *Healthcare Communication Review*.