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TODAYS HEALTH FOR THE EMPOWERED WOMAN

EVALUATING YOUR PHYSICIAN

You will note that television advertisements are currently airing websites that purport to inform you if the physician you have selected is competent, knows how to perform your proposed procedure, has had any lawsuits or actions taken against him/her by licensing authorities. Nothing could be more offensive or misleading to the general public and to physicians than these companies. They merely harvest patient complaints or accolades and collate public sites that list actions against physicians. Why this is inaccurate and not a valid picture of your doctor is this: first of all if only one patient had a bad experience and reported it or had a personal vendetta to smear a doctor and the thousands that were happy did not report it, it would appear that the doctor would receive an "F". Secondly, no acuity is taken into account. A physician who has had no complications is probably lying and one that has had many may or may not be competent. Acuity is not factored in these evaluations, nor demographics. A doctor who cares for the very ill and a surgeon who operates on high risk patients is going to have more complications than one who cherry picks only the healthy. Is it fair that he would receive a poor "grade" on some of these websites? So, you might ask, how do I know if my doctor is any good, well trained, etc.? New York State has websites that list legal actions against doctors, revocations, fines, etc. Also hospitals collect by mandate huge amounts of information about the doctors that practice in their establishments. Data is collected on surgical and non surgical complications, bleeding, wound infections, returns to operating room, disciplinary actions, wrong site surgery, length of stay, etc. Over time it becomes evident who is good and who is not in a manner that a web site cannot. This information is shared with regulatory agencies. Furthermore, when a physician applies for privileges at a hospital a long and extensive process is begun that checks residency training, amount of patients seen and treated in training, criminal background checks and a review from the National Practitioner Data Bank. Letters of reference must be complete and must be received from any and all previous hospital appointments. As a member of the New York State Board for Medicine and also a member of the Office for Professional Medical Conduct I will tell you that there are no perfect physicians. Every complaint is thoroughly investigated and the Board of Regents has the ultimate say over penalties, reinstatements, etc. So, how to find a good doctor? The local medical society can give you names of board certified specialists and public government websites are complicated but helpful. Word of mouth from friends and neighbors is probably the most accurate but remember that not all patients and physicians have personalities that "click". Bad bedside manner does not automatically translate into a bad physician. So, my advice is to avoid the commercial "grading" websites, to research your physician as indicated above and, if not happy, see someone else. Professionals with years of experience have trained and evaluated your doctor before you see him and the process is ongoing on a daily basis.