



Is your advertising ethical?

Ethics is not definable, is not implementable, because it is not conscious; it involves not only our thinking, but also our feeling. —Valdemar W. Setzer

The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery adopted by membership vote the American Society of Plastic Surgeons Code of Ethics in 1999 to ensure consistency in the ethical standards expected of plastic surgeons. As aesthetic surgeons, we rely on advertising to show the public what services we offer because other than word of mouth, there are few referrals. Equally important is the fact that we want to be able to set ourselves apart from the ever growing number of “cosmetic” surgeons who seem to have boundless amounts of marketing dollars. Having said this, we do hold ourselves to a higher standard and must abide by our ethical code.

By definition the word ethics means the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation; the principles of conduct governing an individual or a group; a guiding philosophy; a consciousness of moral importance; or a set of moral issues or aspects. It really boils down to doing what is right.

The ASAPS membership committee has found an increasing incidence of infractions in web-based advertising leading to a denial of membership. Examples of these problem areas include making claims about your background and training, ability to provide something that no one else in your area can provide or being the proverbial “best facelift surgeon in Anywhere, USA.” If you choose to make such a statement, you should be prepared to have supporting evidence. Other concerns are using photos of models representing an outcome that is simply not attainable. I’m sure you’ve all seen ads run by local competition claiming to take years off of a patient’s face over a lunchtime treatment with minimal downtime.

This table is the advertising section of the ASPS/ASAPS Code of Ethics available

on line at www.plasticsurgery.org. You are encouraged to review this carefully and if you have questions you should contact ASAPS at 1.800.364.2147 or info@surgery.org for guidance.

II. Advertising

A. Subject to the limitations of Section 2, I, G a member may advertise through public communications media such as professional announcements, telephone and medical directories, computer bulletin boards, Internet web pages and broadcast and electronic media. The following are examples of the types of useful information that could be included in ethical advertising. The list is illustrative and should not be interpreted as excluding other relevant information consistent with the ethical guidelines established herein. (11/96)

1. A statement of regular E-mail or website addresses and telephone numbers of the member’s offices.
2. A statement of office hours regularly maintained by the member.
3. A statement of language, other than English, fluently spoken by the physician or a person in the physician’s office.
4. A statement as to specialty board certification or a statement that the physician’s practice is limited to specific fields.
5. A statement that the member provides services under specified private or public insurance plans or health care plans.
6. A statement of names of schools and postgraduate clinical training programs from which the member has graduated together with the degrees received.
7. A listing of the member’s publications in educational journals.

8. A statement of teaching positions currently or formerly held by the member together with pertinent dates.

9. A statement of the member’s affiliations with hospitals or clinics.

10. A statement that the member regularly accepts installment payments of fees, credit cards and/or other available financing options. (10/99)

B. A member shall not compensate or give anything of value directly or indirectly to a representative of the press, radio, television, or other communication medium in anticipation of or return for recommending the member’s services or for professional publicity. A member may pay the reasonable cost of advertising permitted by this Code. A member shall approve all advertisements before dissemination or transmission, and shall retain a copy or record of all such advertisements in their entirety for one year after its dissemination. A member shall be held personally responsible for any violation of the Code of Ethics incurred by a public relations, advertising or similar firm which he or she retains, or any entity that advertises on the member’s behalf. (9/93, 10/99)

C. A member may use photographs of models in his or her advertisements. If photographs of models who have not received the services advertised are displayed in a manner that would suggest the model received the services advertised, the advertisement shall clearly and noticeably state that the model has not received the advertised services. (10/99)

Dr. Edwards is an aesthetic surgeon practicing in Las Vegas, NV and is Chair of the Candidate Liaison Committee.