HEALTHGRADES®
Recognized Doctor Methodology

To help consumers evaluate and compare physicians, HealthGrades analyzed objective physician data to identify leading physicians across the country. The Recognized Doctor designation identifies leading physicians based on state or federal sanctions, malpractice, and board certification. To make the Recognized Doctor list, a physician must:

- Never have had his/her license on probation, suspended, surrendered, or revoked (since HealthGrades started collecting data in year 2000).
- Be free of state or federal disciplinary actions (sanctions) for the last five years.
- Be free of any malpractice judgments, adverse arbitration awards, or monetary settlements for the last five years.
- Be board certified in his/her practice specialty by the American Board of Medical Specialties® (ABMS®), the American Osteopathic Association Bureau of Osteopathic Specialists (Doctor of Osteopathic medicine), or the American Board of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery.

Quarterly updates are made to the Recognized Doctor list based on new sanction, board certification, and malpractice data. For example, a newly sanctioned physician will be removed from the Recognized Doctor list immediately.

Data Acquisition

HealthGrades acquires physician data from a variety of public and private data sources. Cross-matching and verifying physician data from a wide variety of sources makes the HealthGrades physician data robust and comprehensive. Some publically available sources include:

- 50 states' medical board records
- Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, including the National Provider Identifier (NPI)
- American Board of Medical Specialties® (ABMS®)
- American Osteopathic Association Bureau of Osteopathic Specialists

Physician data are updated several times a year. Additionally, quarterly updates are made to the Recognized Doctor list based on new sanction, board certification, and malpractice data.

Disciplinary Actions (Sanctions)

Governmental disciplinary actions are also referred to as sanctions. They are actions taken to discipline or restrict physicians who have demonstrated professional misconduct.

When patients receive poor or questionable care from a physician, they may file a formal complaint with the state medical board or professional licensing organization. Medical colleagues may also

report behavior that concerns them. A group of physicians generally determines the validity and seriousness of a complaint and determines the action to be taken, such as dismissal, warning, license suspension or revocation.

On the federal level, disciplinary actions relate to Medicare, Medicaid, and all federal healthcare programs. These disciplinary actions are handled by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General.

HealthGrades reports state and federal disciplinary actions (if any) from the previous five years except in cases where the action taken was a revocation or surrender of the physician's license. Actions of probation, surrender or revocation are not time limited.

To make the Recognized Doctor list, a physician must:

- Be free of state and federal disciplinary actions (medical board sanctions) for the last five years.
- Never have had his/her license on probation, suspension, revocation or surrender (since HealthGrades started collecting data in year 2000).

Medical Malpractice

Medical malpractice is negligence by a healthcare provider which causes injury. Examples include being improperly diagnosed, treated, medicated or operated upon outside the standard of care. Standard of care is that level of care, skill and treatment which is recognized as acceptable and appropriate by a reasonably prudent similar healthcare provider (doctor, nurse, dentist, etc.) under similar circumstances.

Currently, HealthGrades researches and collects medical malpractice data from organizations that actively collect this data from the following states: California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, and West Virginia. These states provide the four data elements that HealthGrades requires: date, judgment type, description of claim, and dollar amount/range. For all other states, malpractice data are technically available under the Public Information Act; however, accessing this data involves contacting individual courts and requesting paperwork.

HealthGrades reports on closed medical malpractice claims. If a physician has a closed malpractice claim in one of the states available to us, it will be considered even if he/she no longer practices in that state.

A **settlement** payment on a medical malpractice action or claim is not a presumption that medical malpractice has occurred. Claim settlements may occur for a variety of reasons which should not necessarily reflect negatively on the physician's professional competence or conduct.

A **malpractice judgment** is a court order for a physician to pay a party a certain amount of money. This official decision by a court may or may not be based on a jury verdict; however, it is a conclusion that a civil wrong has occurred, typically based upon a preponderance of the evidence presented.

Arbitration is a form of alternative dispute resolution that occurs outside the courts. The parties of a dispute refer to one or more persons (arbitrators) and agree to be bound by the arbitrator(s) decisions.

To make the Recognized Doctor list, a physician must:

- Be free of any malpractice judgments, adverse arbitration awards, or monetary settlements for the last five years.

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Board Certification

Board certification involves a rigorous review of the physician's knowledge, experience, and skill in a specialty. More specifically, board certification means the physician:

- Graduated from a recognized medical school as either an MD or DO.
- Completed several years of training in an accredited residency program.
- Passed an extensive written exam given by the board.

HealthGrades recognizes board certification by the American Board of Medical Specialties® (ABMS®), the American Osteopathic Association Bureau of Osteopathic Specialists (Doctor of Osteopathic medicine), and the American Board of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery.

To make the Recognized Doctor list, a physician must:

- Be board certified in his/her practice specialty.

Analysis Limitations

It must be understood that while the Recognized Doctor list analysis may be valuable in identifying leading physicians, one should not use this information alone to determine the quality of care provided by a physician. The analysis is limited by the following factors:

- Malpractice is not available in all states.
- Data on probation, suspension, revocation or surrender of medical licenses are only available since year 2000 when HealthGrades started collecting this data.
- Although HealthGrades has taken steps to carefully compile these data using its methodology, no techniques are infallible, and therefore some information may be missing, outdated or incorrect.

Please note that a high ranking for a particular physician is not a recommendation or endorsement by Health Grades, Inc. of a particular physician; it means that the data associated with a particular physician have met the foregoing qualifications. Only individual patients can decide whether a particular physician is suited for their unique needs.

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