

Recognized Doctor Methodology

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Introduction

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

- Not have had his or her license 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 by the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) or the American Osteopathic Association (AOA)

Healthgrades makes quarterly updates to the Recognized Doctor list based on board certification data. Healthgrades also receives sanction and malpractice data daily to annually, depending on the state medical board's frequency of updates. For example, a newly sanctioned doctor will be removed from the Recognized Doctor list as soon as Healthgrades receives the information. However, it is important to note that malpractice information is publically available in only 14 states.

Data Source

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

- State licensing boards
- 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 (AOA)
- Sanction and disciplinary action data from all 50 states
- Malpractice data from 14 states (see below)

Healthgrades updates the data several times a year and updates the Recognized Doctor list quarterly based on board certification data.

About Malpractice Data

Currently, Healthgrades researches and collects medical malpractice data from organizations that actively collect this data from the following states:

- California
- Florida
- Georgia
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Maryland
- Nevada
- New Jersey
- New York
- Oregon
- Tennessee
- Virginia
- West Virginia

These states provide the following elements that Healthgrades requires:

- Date
- Claim type
- Dollar amount or range

Healthgrades reports on closed medical malpractice claims from state medical boards. If a doctor has a closed malpractice claim in one of the 14 states from which we collect data, the claim will be considered even if he or she no longer practices in that state.

Disciplinary Actions (Sanctions)

Governmental disciplinary actions, also known as sanctions, are taken to discipline or restrict doctors who have demonstrated professional misconduct.

When patients receive poor or questionable care from a doctor, 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 doctors generally determines the validity and seriousness of a complaint and determines what action to take, such as dismissal, warning, license suspension, or license 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 all 50 states for the previous five years, except in cases where the action was a revocation or surrender of the doctor's license. Surrender or revocation actions are not time limited.

To make the Recognized Doctor list, a doctor must be free of state and federal disciplinary actions (medical board sanctions) for the last five years and not have had his or her license surrendered or revoked (since Healthgrades started collecting data in 2000).

Medical Malpractice

In general, malpractice is professional negligence by a healthcare provider that is both below the accepted standard of practice in the medical community and that causes injury or death to a patient. The definition of medical malpractice may vary by state because each state has adopted a medical practice act that defines the practice of medicine in that state.

Examples include improper diagnosis, treatment, medication or operation outside the standard of care.

Three Types of Medical Malpractice

Methods by which medical malpractice is resolved include a settlement, an arbitration award, or a judgment.

- **Settlement** - a payment on a medical malpractice action or claim settled out of court. It is not a presumption that malpractice has occurred.
- **Arbitration Award** - a payment on a medical malpractice action or claim typically based on a decision by a third-party arbiter. It is not a presumption that malpractice has occurred.
- **Judgment** - a court order for a doctor, or his or her employer, to pay a party a certain amount of money. It is a conclusion that a civil wrong has occurred.

What a Malpractice Claim Means to You

If your doctor has a malpractice claim, evaluate the information and determine if the action could potentially impact the quality of care you receive. Claim settlements and arbitration awards may occur for a variety of reasons, which should not necessarily reflect negatively on the doctor's professional competence or conduct. You may want to use this information to start a discussion with the doctor about his or her history and specific ability to provide healthcare for you.

To make the Recognized Doctor list, a doctor must be free of any malpractice judgments, adverse arbitration awards, or monetary settlements for the last five years.

Board Certification

Board certification should be one of your top considerations when choosing a doctor. Board certification indicates that a doctor is highly qualified in the medical field in which he or she practices and the doctor is actively improving his or her practice of medicine through continuing education.

A board-certified doctor is more likely than a non-board-certified doctor to have the most current skills and knowledge about how to treat your medical condition.

Board certification is an official recognition given to doctors who have met specific requirements set by national medical specialty boards in the United States. Healthgrades recognizes board certification by:

- American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS)
- American Osteopathic Association (AOA)

Board certification requires extensive training and a rigorous review of a doctor's knowledge, experience and skill in a medical specialty. Board certification also means the doctor:

- 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

What If a Doctor Isn't Board Certified?

Some doctors choose not to apply for board certification. A doctor who is not board certified may be an excellent doctor, but his or her skills and knowledge have not been formally measured or evaluated by a certifying board. If you are interested in a doctor who is not board certified, you might want to ask the doctor about his or her experience, skills, and specific ability to provide healthcare for you.

To make the Recognized Doctor list, a doctor must be board certified.

Limitations of Healthgrades Analysis

While the Recognized Doctor list analysis may be valuable in identifying leading doctors, one should not use this information alone to determine the quality of care provided by a doctor. 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 the 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 the Recognized Doctor designation is not a recommendation or endorsement by Health Grades, Inc. of a particular doctor; it means that the data associated with a particular doctor have met the foregoing qualifications. Only individual patients can decide whether a particular doctor is suited for their unique needs.