Online Reviews and the Medical Industry

★★★★★
James D.
I can not give any higher praise! Excellent service and staff all around.

ER | **EXPERT REPUTATION**

ONLINE REVIEWS AND THE MEDICAL INDUSTRY

The Increasing Impact of Online Reviews for Today's Medical Professionals

Bruce E. Bekkar, M.D.
Philip R. Devore, D.D.S.
Robert H. Kaplan, P.h.D.

The Medical Industry in the Digital Age

Healthcare is a complex field, not well understood by the layman patient. But patients are now having an impact in a very public way.

Ready or not, medical professionals and organizations are part of the online review world. Proactive doctors and organizations are learning to manage their online reviews before their reviews manage them.

Everything is being reviewed online today. What's more, consumers are turning to peer-driven online reviews and recommendations to make purchase decisions - and healthcare decisions - at an unprecedented rate. For an increasing number of medical professionals, online reviews impact practice volume and viability, and even perceptions among their peers and within their organization.

To appreciate this powerful trend, it's crucial to understand the following:

• The growing prevalence of online reviews in a digital, consumer-driven world;
• Why medical professionals must paying attention to and actively manage their online reviews;
• How management of online reviews can impact revenue generation in medical practices.

70%
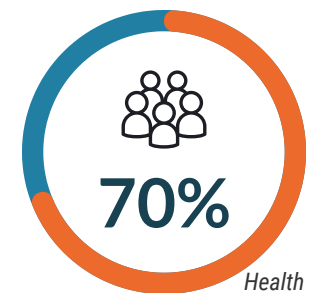
Health Leaders(1)

of patients say online reviews are crucial in selecting a healthcare provider

Online Reviews: The Rise of Online Consumer Feedback

"It takes an entire 20 years to build a reputation, and only 5 minutes to ruin it."

-Warren Buffet-

★★★★★

In the early days of the Internet, only a handful of websites featured ways for customers to leave reviews. Today, there are not only many highly trafficked websites dedicated solely to customer reviews, but more importantly these ratings now appear in search results and even map directions.

Sites like Google, Amazon, Trip Advisor, Consumer Reports, and Site Jabber give consumers a place to rate and review all types of businesses. And most online stores now provide consumer review mechanisms for products or services purchased through them.

There are dedicated review sites for every industry - including healthcare, such as WebMD, Vitals and Healthgrades. And these review spaces aren't the only source for consumers: "social media" (eg. Facebook, Twitter) plays an ever-increasing role in circulating consumer's opinions, further enhancing their impact.

The New "Word of Mouth"

Online reviews are an amplified form of word of mouth, one without socioeconomic or geographic boundaries, and without the filter of polite in person interaction. Anyone can post a review online, accurate or not, and anyone else can read it. An increasing number of consumers are making decisions based on these reviews.

Research from Cone(2) indicates that nearly 9 of 10 of consumers trust online reviews, and 80% have changed their minds about making a purchase decision solely based on negative online reviews.

There is more surprising news about consumer behavior. Software Advice (3) found that 70% of patients think it's important for practices to respond to online reviews.
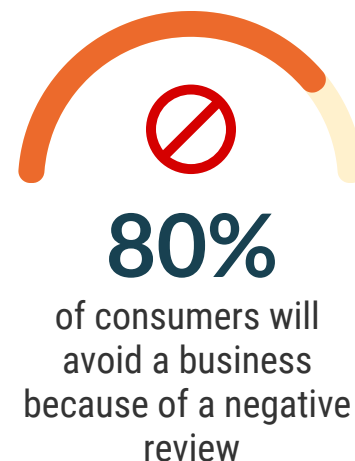
Online Reviews and Health Professionals

Doctors and Dentists are some of the most reviewed individuals. Rather than a business reviews - like a dry cleaner - these reviews identify their providers by name. A study found that over 69% of patients visit at least two review sites before choosing a provider(4). Reviews are proliferating not only through more review websites dedicated to healthcare, but also through social media and mobile apps that allow users to locate, rate, and review doctors, practitioners, practices, and facilities

According to Healthcare Dive(4), more than 69% of patients visit at least two review sites before selecting a provider.

Some of the top online review sites covering doctors and health professionals are:

Google My Business: this platform remains the main point of reference for a variety of consumers, but especially prospective patients. Google My Business' 2021 survey found that 84% of online consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations.

HealthGrades: this combination healthcare locator and review site is the most popular in the U.S., covering 54% of physicians in the country, according to a study by Loyola University Chicago Health Sciences Division(5).

Vitals: the second-most popular review and recommendation site for health professionals and covers 45% of U.S. physicians.

RateMDs: with 25% of U.S. physicians reviewed, RateMDs enables prospective patients to browse and choose a provider based on their reviews and expertise.

ScoreDoc: offers users a report card of selected providers that grade them based on online reviews.

The Loyola study found that the number of reviews per physician on each website range from 0 to 64, with an overall average of 2.4 reviews per physician per site. It also reported the total number of Americans who use online sources to research healthcare: 50% look up their providers online and read reviews, with 40% specifically using physician review websites.

80%
of consumers will avoid a business because of a negative review

9 out of 10
consumers say they trust online reviews

70%
expect practices to respond to online reviews

Online Reviews and Medical Care Decisions

Software Advice found that 77% of people use online reviews as the first step in finding a new healthcare provider. In another study of practices found that 43% of respondents said that a practice's positive review history often attracted out-of-network patients.

The impact of positive or negative reviews is substantial. While 80% of consumers typically look elsewhere if a provider has a negative online presence (6), 68% are willing to pay more for providers who are known to give good customer service (7).

77%
of consumers use online reviews to find a **healthcare** provider

80%
of consumers look for a different provider after reading negative reviews

68%
of consumers are willing to pay more for businesses with known good service

Potential Practice Damage from Negative Reviews

Negative reviews are nearly impossible to avoid and seem to have an outsized impact. The dissatisfied are naturally more motivated to vent via online review. Search engines rank results by prior activity on that site. Negative reviews, usually being more impassioned, are also often found to be more entertaining and get a disproportionate share of attention. So those reviews often rank higher in search results, even when other sites may have more positive reviews for the same search.

Negative reviews may escalate as well. Unhappy people tend to share their opinions more widely than satisfied ones. Online, it has been observed that a bad review may spark additional negative comments from others that might not otherwise have been posted.

A case study(8) published by Simon Sikorski, MD, CEO of Healthcare Marketing Center of Excellence, highlighted the negative impact that bad reviews can cause. For example, a medical spa with two Plastic Surgeons received 5 negative reviews due to a failed Groupon campaign. The review site rose in search engine rankings above the results for the spa's website. In the next two-week period, a total of 22 patients canceled appointments and the spa received no calls from new patients.

The first reaction of a practice is often an attempt to get negative reviews removed. But that is usually a futile and even if successful, a slow process. In isolated cases, physicians have even tried to sue patients for leaving negative reviews - but they are rarely, if ever, successful - the reviews tending to be protected as "freedom of speech." Physicians are all too aware of the risks and significant financial burden of engaging the legal system.

The best approach is to be sure you are continually generating positive reviews from your satisfied patients and clients, which moves the older negative reviews way down the list of reviews to read.

Online Reputation: A Proactive Approach

Many physicians and entire healthcare organizations now understand the importance of online reviews, and are taking steps to manage their reputation, ensure their satisfied patients are making their voice heard, which maximizes the benefit rather than trying to resist the tide of online reviews.

The following are "best practices" in this rapidly evolving field:

Generate positive reviews: Medical professionals and organizations that commit to encouraging patients to leave positive, recent, specific reviews online see their reputation improved, patient base stabilized and grown, and their practices thrive.

Monitor reviews: You can't please everyone all the time - there will be dissatisfied clients that vent via an online review. Since negative reviews can be damaging to a Practice, it's advisable to become aware of them immediately. But by continually generating positive reviews, thriving practices overcome a few negatives. Research has even shown, that consumers are skeptical if a product or service has only glowing good reviews.

Respond rapidly to negative reviews: As noted, 95% of consumers will return to a business - and are likely to remove that negative review - if their concerns are addressed quickly. Misconceptions from outdated or incorrect information are a common problem that can easily be corrected once identified.

Several leading healthcare professionals and organizations are participating more in social networks and physician review websites: posting complete profiles, monitoring reviews, responding to complaints and actively soliciting positive comments. Services have emerged to assist in this process across the complex landscape of review websites, providing varying levels of service at a wide range of costs. There are a few that specialize in monitoring healthcare related websites and serve physicians and health plans.

Dr. Bruce Bekkar spent more than 24 years as a staff doctor for Kaiser Permanente in the department of Ob/Gyn, and was part of the Clinic leadership team. Bruce is an award-winning author and has appeared numerous times on national television, radio and print media.

Dr. Philip Devore practices dentistry in Las Vegas, is a Consultant to the dental industry and associate professor at UNLV where he is Clinical Director of the Faculty Group Practice. He is an expert witness, regularly published, and a leader in marketing and practice development in the dentistry field.

Dr. Robert Kaplan, PhD, is the Associate Director of the Master's in Applied Science Program in the School of Medicine at UCSD and an adjunct assistant clinical professor at the Department of Family and Preventive Medicine, University of California, San Diego. Dr. Kaplan is also a founder and partner with The Torrey Pines Health Group, Inc. and a founder of SeniorMetrix, Inc.

Review Monitoring

Weekly Report Cards

Listings Manager

Our Services

Performance Analytics

Patient Surveys

Review Generation

Our clients experience:

48%

increase in reviews in just **one month**

★★★★★

Up to **4.5 star increase** in just 3 months

REVIEWIQ

Review Generation & Monitoring

Increase your positive online reviews and stand out to prospective patients. ReviewIQ is the HIPPA compliant software that individual physicians and practices use to generate positive reviews via SMS and emails from their happy patients. Control every aspect of your reputation and online presence and watch your practice grow.

Maintain Control Of Your Data

LISTINGSMANAGER

Listings Manager ensures your company data is in agreement across the internet, which is essential for SEO. Automatically disseminate, maintain, and update your business profile on platforms, directories, and navigation services that consumers rely on to find you.

PRACTICEPULSE

Manage Feedback

PracticePulse provides individual medical practices and multi-location facilities a comprehensive way to systematically solicit patient feedback and online reviews through SMS and email. It's a multifaceted toolbox which gives management teams deep insight into both the health of their facilities and individual providers at each location.

(1) 70% of Patients Call Online Reviews Crucial in Selecting Healthcare Providers, healthleadersmedia.com, https://www.healthleadersmedia.com/clinical-care/70-patients-call-online-reviews-crucial-selecting-healthcare-providers

(2) 2011 Online Influence Trend Tracker, Cone Communications, http://www.conecomm.com/2011coneonlineinfluencetrendtracker

(3) How Patients Use Online Reviews, softwareadvice.com, https://www.softwareadvice.com/resources/how-patients-use-online-reviews/

(4) Study of Online Reviews Reveals the Importance of Having High Star Ratings for Healthcare Providers in 2021, healthcaredive.com, Study of Online Reviews Reveals the Importance of Having High Star Ratings for Healthcare Providers in 2021

(5) Health Online 2013, Pew Research Center, http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/01/15/health-online-2013/

(6) Quaintise.com, Latest Healthcare Marketing Insights, https://blog.quaintise.com/must-read-statistics-on-patient-reviews-and-online-reputation

(7) Hubspot, 2018 Customer Service Expectations Survey, https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/2771217/Content/2018%20Customer%20Service%20Expectations%20Gladly.pdf

(8) "Implications of a Doctor's Online Reputation", Slideshare.com, http://www.slideshare.net/HealthcareMarketingCOE/doctor-reputation-management-13770038