

Managing Negative Online Reviews From Patients

The internet and social media have fundamentally changed the ways in which healthcare consumers gather and exchange information. More and more, patients are going online to research health information, find providers, and comment about their positive and negative healthcare experiences.

A recent survey of more than 500 patients showed that 90 percent of participants use online reviews to evaluate doctors, 71 percent use online reviews as the first step in finding a doctor, and 66 percent feel that it is very

important or moderately important for providers to respond to online reviews.¹

These survey statistics (a) underscore the significance of social media and review sites to the viability and reputation of healthcare organizations and practitioners, and (b) highlight the importance of preparing for potentially negative reviews.

Although managing unfavorable reviews can present challenges and pitfalls, various risk management strategies² can help providers navigate these situations.

1

As part of your organization's communication and social media policies, develop a strategy for interacting with patients online, including responding to both positive and negative online reviews.

2

Designate an appropriate individual to monitor the organization's online presence an online reviews and comments about individual providers.

3

Explore the possibility of using online alerts and other technology solutions to monitor feedback about your organization and to assist with reputation management for the organization and its providers.

4

Develop scripted language to respond to negative online reviews. The language should emphasize the organization's commitment to high-quality patient care and satisfaction and should encourage individuals who have concerns to contact the office directly.

5

Be vigilant about federal and state privacy regulations, and ensure that anyone responding to online patient reviews understands the obligation to protect patient privacy and confidentiality.

6

In each circumstance, consider the best approach for handling the online review. Options might include (a) not responding at all, (b) responding online in a professional manner, or (c) contacting a known patient directly to address his/her concerns.

7

When responding to negative reviews, avoid sounding defensive, making excuses, or criticizing the patient in any way. Under no circumstances should a provider or staff member engage in online arguments or behavior that might be considered threatening or unprofessional.

8

Reinforce the importance of treating all patients with dignity, courtesy, and respect, and establish the expectation that all providers and staff members exhibit professionalism during both in-person and online interactions.

9

View online reviews as a learning opportunity for both providers and staff members. Evaluate positive and negative reviews, and discuss how the organization can build on quality improvement processes.

10

Encourage trusted, satisfied patients to post online reviews. Reviews that discuss positive experiences with the organization and its providers will help counteract negative reviews.

11

Devise a plan for how your organization can use social media to build a positive online presence and share its mission. Doing so can help build your online reputation and offset potentially negative feedback.

12

Consult legal counsel or consider contacting a review site's webmaster if a patient posts information that is false or defamatory.

Endnotes

¹ Hedges, L., & Couey, C. (2020, April 3). *How patients use online reviews*. Software Advice. Retrieved from www.softwareadvice.com/resources/how-patients-use-online-reviews/#1

² Adler, E. L. (2016, September 21). How not to respond to bad patient reviews online. *Physicians Practice*. Retrieved from www.physicianspractice.com/marketing/how-not-respond-bad-patient-reviews-online; Chauhan, M. K. (2016, December 18). Managing patient online reviews can make a difference. *Physicians Practice*. Retrieved from www.physicianspractice.com/blog/managing-patient-online-reviews-can-make-difference; Cryts, A. (2016, December 1). Docs, ignore millennials' online reviews at your peril. FierceHealthcare. Retrieved from www.fiercehealthcare.com/practices/docs-ignore-millennials-online-reviews-at-your-peril; Kropf, S. (2015, May 8). Responding to negative online patient reviews: 7 tips. *Physicians Practice*. Retrieved from www.physicianspractice.com/blog/responding-negative-online-patient-reviews-7-tips; Segel, R. (2017, January 4). Dissed by unhappy patients? Here's what to do. *MedPage Today*. Retrieved from www.medpagetoday.com/PracticeManagement/PracticeManagement/62349; Weber, S. (2015, December 14). How to: Deal with negative online reviews. *Physicians Practice*. Retrieved from www.physicianspractice.com/view/how-deal-negative-online-reviews

This document does not constitute legal or medical advice and should not be construed as rules or establishing a standard of care. Because the facts applicable to your situation may vary, or the laws applicable in your jurisdiction may differ, please contact your attorney or other professional advisors if you have any questions related to your legal or medical obligations or rights, state or federal laws, contract interpretation, or other legal questions.

MedPro Group is the marketing name used to refer to the insurance operations of The Medical Protective Company, Princeton Insurance Company, PLICO, Inc. and MedPro RRG Risk Retention Group. All insurance products are underwritten and administered by these and other Berkshire Hathaway affiliates, including National Fire & Marine Insurance Company. Product availability is based upon business and/or regulatory approval and may differ among companies.

© 2021 MedPro Group Inc. All rights reserved.