

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 looking online to address their healthcare needs and to comment about their experiences.

A survey of more than 2,500 patients showed that 82 percent of participants use online reviews to evaluate doctors, 72 percent use online reviews to find a new doctor, and 19 percent use online reviews to validate their

provider choices.¹ These numbers underscore the significance of online reviews – both positive and negative – to healthcare organizations’ and practitioners’ reputations and viability.

For healthcare providers, the need to manage their online reputations is becoming more imperative as review sites increase in popularity. Although negative online reviews can present challenges, providers can implement a number of risk management strategies to address this issue.²

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 as well as online reviews and comments about individual providers.

3

Explore the possibility of using online alerts and other technology solutions to manage the organization's and providers' online reputations.

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 aware of state and federal 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

Avoid responses to negative reviews that sound defensive, make excuses, or criticize the patient in any way. Additionally, avoid engaging in online arguments or behavior that might be considered threatening or unprofessional.

8

Understand and reinforce the importance of treating all patients with courtesy and respect and exhibiting professionalism in both in-person and online interactions.

9

Consider online reviews a learning opportunity for both providers and staff. Review both 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 provide balance for potential 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 Health, S. (2018, April 16). How do patients use online provider reviews for care decisions? PatientEngagementHIT.com. Retrieved from <https://patientengagementhit.com/news/how-do-patients-use-online-provider-reviews-for-care-decisions>
- 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/marketing/how-to-deal-with-negative-online-reviews

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