Five Ways to Improve Your Online Reputation

Monitor your online reviews, and respond accordingly to attract patients to your practice.

BY CARY M. SILVERMAN, MD, MBA, AND SHAMA HYDER

Did you know that at least one in four patients reads online reviews to find his or her next doctor? According to a recent study by Software Advice, the use of online review sites such as Healthgrades and Yelp is quickly growing across all demographics but especially among young adults.¹

That same study found that patients who use online health care reviews do so primarily to find a new doctor and that, startlingly, 26% of patients indicated they would go out of network based on the information they obtained. It also indicated that the sites patients use most frequently are Healthgrades, Yelp, Facebook, Vitals, and ZocDoc; Healthgrades tops the list with 43% of users. Online reviews, then, motivate new patients to invest money in their health care, so it is in your best interest to enhance your online reputation.

WHAT PATIENTS WANT TO KNOW

Patients are particular about the information they want to see in online reviews. There are aspects of care that most patients regard as deal breakers. This list identifies what patients want to learn from an online review, based on the study’s findings.

1. Quality of Care
   Patients want to know the quality of care they can expect from a doctor, and they will be motivated to try a physician who regularly provides high-quality care to his or her patients. This is the single most important issue for new reviews to address.

2. Accuracy of Diagnosis
   Prospective patients seem anxious to know that the doctor usually gets it right (ie, that the diagnosis is accurate). This speaks to his or her credibility and reliability.

3. Credentials
   Patients, particularly senior citizens, want reassurance that the physician is experienced. They also like to see recent certifications and specialties listed, so update your online profile regularly.

4. The Office Staff
   Patients do not want a hassle in the waiting room, and convenience is so important. They are reading reviews to see if the waiting time is long or if the payment system is unorganized. These factors will drive patients away.

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

Because only 10% of your patients are likely to leave an online review, you need to make the most of each opportunity. Improve your online reputation by following these steps.

1. Regularly Monitor Online Reviews
   At least once a month, check your reviews on Healthgrades and Yelp, because those are the most popular sites. Make a note of what patients are thrilled with, and use those phrases and services in advertising.
   Respond appropriately to any negative reviews. It is important to maintain patients’ confidentiality, and your professional reputation depends on staying cool in the face of criticism. Patients will be impressed with a simple acknowledgement that you heard the concern and have taken steps to address the issue.

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2. Update Your Profile
   At least once a year, update your years of experience, and add any new certifications to your online information. A recently refreshed profile can give you the edge over the competition.

3. Ask for Reviews
   Do not be shy about asking patients for reviews. Send follow-up emails after appointments requesting that patients review their experiences. Include links to review sites at the bottom of monthly newsletters to encourage more reviews.
   Specifically, ask patients to comment on the four most important issues: quality of care, accuracy of diagnosis, the doctor’s experience, and the office staff. Patients are more likely to leave a review if they know what to say, and those topics are the most helpful for your reputation.

4. Offer a Giveaway
   A fun social media campaign offers giveaways for reviews. Over a period of 1 week, use social media, newsletters, and office visits to encourage your patients to enter for a chance to win a prize. Patients do not need to leave a perfect rating to win, but this strategy motivates patients to say how much they like you.

5. Ask New Patients How They Found You
   Learn where your new patients are coming from so you can get more of them. When someone mentions a review site, be sure to note which site it was. Remind that patient to leave a review as well, because he or she is more likely to do so than patients referred by other sources.

CONCLUSION
   You put a lot of effort into your patients and your practice. With a little planning and monitoring, you can burnish your online reputation. Keep your profile up to date, and respond graciously to comments. Most of all, let your care and expertise shine through in all you do.

Shama Hyder is a best-selling author, speaker, and president of The Marketing Zen Group in Dallas. Ms. Hyder may be reached at shama@marketingzen.com; Twitter @Shama.

Cary M. Silverman, MD, MBA, is medical director of EyeCare 20/20 in East Hanover, New Jersey. Dr. Silverman may be reached at csilverman@eyecare2020.com; Twitter @The LASIKdoc.