

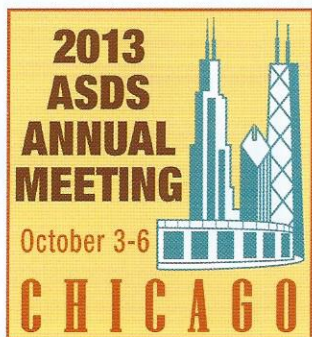
CURRENTS

A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR DERMATOLOGIC SURGERY

September/October 2013

Reputation Preservation

**A survival
guide for
online reviews**



**Annual Meeting
Special Section**

**Millions See
Branding
Campaign**

Join in with
toolkits,
blog posts

**Advocacy
Spotlight**

News from
AMA, states

**Beyond
Medicine**

Mentors provide
career advice

Naming System

Task Force
recommends
lexicon rules

Reputation survival on

Dealing with negative reviews

By Wendy Lewis

Consider this scenario. You are a highly experienced dermatologic surgeon with a thriving practice built on excellent patient care and outcomes – and then you get an unfair negative online review with little or no way of responding.

The Internet has made the world much smaller. As such, news travels quickly and has a permanent home in cyberspace. The same goes for reviews of your medical practice. Most will always be good, but occasionally a negative review will pop up.

Online doctor reviews can touch on almost anything – from the rug in your waiting room to the appearance of the staff to conversations overheard at the front desk, all the way to waiting times, bedside manner, medical care and treatment results. Fees and billing disputes also rank high on the list. Not surprisingly, so do topics that would be considered normal consequences of treatment in any dermatologic practice, such as swelling and bruising after filler injections or discomfort during laser hair removal.

In today's world, you need to pay careful attention to these online conversations so you have the ability to intervene before they get a chance to go viral.

"It is essential to look at your reviews for clues as to what you may or may not be doing right," said Joel Schlessinger, MD. "Just because they are unflattering doesn't mean you can't learn from them. Perhaps one of your staff members is off or maybe you have lost your 'mojo' for the time being. Whatever the case, they can't just be ignored or they will eventually become a determinant in whether or not new patients come to you."

You can keep tabs on your online reviews by setting up an "alert" through Google Alerts, *talkwalker.com* or *mention.net* so you receive a notice every time a new article with your name is posted online. The next step is to purchase your name or practice's domain name and any relevant variations to protect

yourself from one of your competitors owning a similar domain name, which could hurt your search results. You want to make sure that when someone types in your practice name that your own website is the first that shows up in search results.

Delegate the monitoring of your online reputation to a trusted staff member or outsource to an experienced consultant or web developer. This monitoring process should include your website as well as any social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, blog, etc.) you are active on, including review sites, professional organizations, hospital, surgery center or teaching hospital sites.

Dealing with negative reviews


Online research is now a key component of the decision-making process for patients in selecting a dermatologic surgeon. Patients are looking for a healthy amount of honest, sincere reviews and will expect some to be better than others. Consumers today are very savvy about sifting through reviews, and their radar is up for anything that sounds planted or scripted. It is critical, however, to have more positive reviews than negative reviews.

To see what is being posted about you and your practice, peruse the first three to five pages that come up when you search for your name and business name. There is always the chance that you may find something you do not like or are surprised by. It can happen to anyone – even to doctors who are top in their fields.


Regrettably, there are few options for physicians to deter this kind of behavior. Not only can it be difficult to uncover the actual identity of a poster, but HIPAA also restricts physicians from disclosing medical facts and treatments relating to a patient who has posted a negative comment online, therefore preventing the physician from being able to refute a false or defamatory post in an open forum.


When a patient has a problem, always try to fix the situation before it results in a negative online review.

Physician-review websites to keep an eye on

AngiesList.com – Offers reviews to members for a fee on everything from home repair to health care professionals. The reviews cannot be anonymous and the doctors on the website cannot pay to appear on the page. The ratings range from A to F, on the basis of price, quality, responsiveness, punctuality and professionalism. Each review is vetted to ensure legitimacy. 

DrScore.com – Allows patients to find a doctor by name, specialty, city, state or ZIP code and score a doctor to rate

their satisfaction with various aspects of the care received. The site also lists dozens of patient advocacy groups and articles related to topics such as being an empowered patient and doctor-patient communication tips. 

Google+ Local – Offers a new element for businesses to integrate more Google features, specifically the social network of Google+, which requires real names of reviewers. 

line: Protect yourself

"We organically try to please the patients so they don't go ballistic and write a bad review. I do listen to anything that is said, and most of the time, it is about a billing dispute, scheduling hiccup or something mundane like that," said Amy Derick, MD.

Encouraging positive reviews

Neither you nor your staff should post or facilitate fake reviews from "happy patients" as state medical boards may consider the posting of false reviews to be a violation of their code of ethical behavior.

However, you can always encourage satisfied patients to write legitimate reviews. The more positive reviews you can get about your practice, the more you can bury less-than-glowing ones further down the search list. Finding creative ways to get satisfied clients to post real reviews has become common practice in service businesses, including medical offices.

"We tried many different ways to get patients to write reviews. It has taken a long time to get the staff to become comfortable enough to ask for a review," said Ronald Shelton, MD.

One way to encourage patient reviews is by asking your most-satisfied patients to post a review online while they are waiting to be seen. Simply post a sign at the reception desk that reads: "We hope you received satisfying care at our practice. Please help us raise our online visibility by writing a short review of your visit at maps.google.com. Just search for our practice and click on More Info and Write a Review. We appreciate your support."

"We encourage patients to write reviews whenever possible. If someone says, 'This is a great practice,' we ask them to write about us," said Dr. Derick.

Offering patients an incentive to get them to write a review is generally frowned upon. Google and Yelp consider it a violation of their guidelines. Although there is no minimum or optimum number of reviews, try to avoid going for a few months without any reviews and then getting a flurry of activities in the same day. That is a definite red flag.



Keep your profile current on the sites that are most relevant to your practice and include a recent, friendly looking photo, updated bio and robust professional information with all your training, degrees, academic affiliations, publications, research, memberships and special expertise. Maintain a patient-friendly website with links to your blog and social media platforms.

"Watch carefully and address any reviews that are clearly false. Sadly, the system allows this to continue and, in the name of free speech, many doctors are exposed to untrue and libelous reviews with no opportunity to set the record straight. The hope, though, is that the system will eventually allow more of a voice to the physician in the process and consider the other side of the equation in every review," said Dr. Schlessinger. ■

Wendy Lewis is president of Wendy Lewis & Co. Ltd., Global Aesthetics Consultancy, author of 11 books and founder/editor-in-chief of beautyinthebag.com.

Healthgrades.com – Caters to three audiences (consumers, doctors and hospitals) and claims to have 225 million users. Consumers can research and compare doctors across a range of attributes and book appointments online. Physicians can update their profiles at no cost with additional details about conditions treated and procedures performed.

healthgrades

Lifescript.com – Provides articles for female health, beauty and wellness. It also allows patients to search for doctors by specialty, insurance accepted, condition

lifescript
healthy living for women

and location. To review a doctor on the site, the reviewer simply clicks on "comments" on the doctor's profile and is able to post anonymously.

MakeMeHeal.com – Functions as a doctor directory (featuring dermatologists) as well as a patient review site and online store. Patients can search through the directory using several filters. There is a monthly fee for physicians to have a premium listing on the site, which touts 1.5 million users.

make{me}heal

continued on pages 8-9