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# 10 THINGS ABOUT: ONLINE REVIEWS

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- 1.** If you have an “M.D.” or a “D.O.” after your name, you can count on having listings on physician review sites. This is true regardless of whether anyone has ever actually posted a review about you. Typically there will be some basic information such as your address and phone number, whether you are board certified and languages spoken in your office. – 4.2.20 MS
- 2.** Although you likely have numerous patients who are very pleased with your care, unfortunately, it is often only the disgruntled few who will take the time to write a review. Oftentimes a negative review will appear after a psychiatrist has refused to prescribe a particular medication to an apparent drug-seeker. – 3.7.19 MS
- 3.** As a physician, you are very limited in your ability to respond to these complaints. Due to physician-patient confidentiality, you cannot provide your side of the story. This is true even if the patient has revealed every detail of your treatment. – 3.7.19 MS
- 4.** If you can identify the patient (some will post their names or provide sufficient information for you to determine their identity) you may wish to contact the patient directly to see whether any problems can be resolved which would then cause the patient to reconsider his or her review. – 4.2.20 MS
- 5.** If you believe that the review contains false information you may try contacting the site posting the review and ask that it be removed. Some sites will be willing to do this especially if you can show that the poster has violated the sites rules for example by using profanity in his or her review. – 4.2.20 MS
- 6.** If a negative review misstates a fact about policies or procedures within your office, you may clarify this. For example, if a review states that a patient was told he’d be given a prescription at his first visit but was not, you could respond with a brief statement that provides factual information but does not in any way refer to the patient (or acknowledge a treatment relationship) such as, “I can neither confirm nor deny that I have treated this patient; however, it is my policy not to provide prescriptions at the first appointment.”

- 7.** Do not try to counter negative reviews by posting fake positive reviews. This practice is called “astroturfing” and is illegal. One physician practice was fined \$300,000 by the New York State Attorney General after it was revealed that staff members were posing as patients and writing glowing reviews in an effort to mitigate the poor reviews of real patients.
- 8.** Do not try to prevent negative reviews by requiring patients to sign contracts agreeing not to post bad reviews as a condition of treatment.
- 9.** While it might be tempting to ask patients who are happy with your care to post reviews on your behalf, there are ethical issues involved in doing so as patients may feel as though they are unable to refuse. – 3.7.19 MS
- 10.** Consider setting up a LinkedIn profile. As LinkedIn scores very high on Google searches, it is likely patients will discover your profile there before going to review sites. LinkedIn allows you to provide information about yourself and your practice thus allowing you to control what information a patient sees first.

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