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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.
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. 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.
4. If you can identify the patient (some will post their names or provide sufficient information for you to determine their identity) and it is a current patient, you may wish to contact them directly to see whether any problems can be resolved which would then cause the patient to reconsider his or her review. Even if the patient is unwilling to remove their review, you may still get valuable information that can help you avoid such reviews in the future, e.g., a discourteous staff member, or difficulty in reaching you.
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 review. Some sites will allow a set number of “take downs” a year, with no questions asked
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. 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.
9. Thanking someone online for a positive review is a HIPAA violation as it acknowledges the existence of a treatment relationship.
10. Although it is sometimes difficult to do, it is usually best to ignore a bad review. We have often seen that efforts to have a review removed or responses by physicians have only resulted in the reviewer making additional negative comments or posting reviews on other sites.

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