



Best Practices for Responding to Patient Reviews

Overview

We live in a customer-driven world, where the voice of the patient is amplified like never before. Businesses, including healthcare facilities, are increasingly impacted by online patient reviews. Prospective patients rely on this form of feedback to select providers in growing numbers.

According to Pew Research, nearly 80 percent of consumers rely on patient reviews to select their healthcare providers.¹ But it's not just the reviews themselves that inform potential patients' first impressions; they also judge hospitals and clinics based on how they respond to those comments and ratings.

As a result, soliciting, monitoring and responding to online reviews have become critical components of a successful Online Reputation Management program.

This ebook offers best practices for responding to patient reviews. We'll address the following questions:

1. **What are the benefits of responding to reviews?**
2. **Which reviews should you respond to?**
3. **What are the HIPAA guidelines to keep in mind while responding to reviews?**
4. **How can you glean operational insights from reviews to perpetuate the virtuous cycle and improve patient experience?**



A difference of one "star" in an online rating generates a

5 to 9% difference in revenue

~ Harvard Business Review

Why Monitor and Respond to Reviews?

Now more than ever, patients expect transparency from their healthcare providers. Facing higher deductibles and out-of-pocket expenses, healthcare consumers are not as passive about choosing doctors and healthcare systems as they've been in the past. Patients are going online to research doctors and hospitals more than ever.

Consumers know they have choices, so they turn to online review sites and social networks for information about providers. They're looking for high star ratings and positive reviews.

According to SoftwareAdvice, nearly 80 percent of consumers report using online reviews as a first step to seeking a healthcare provider, while 16 percent use them to validate the doctor they've chosen.²

Most healthcare providers have more positive than negative reviews. But negative reviews happen to everyone, and many providers don't have an accepted process in place for responding. If a negative review goes without answer, it can lead to additional negative reviews, especially if the patient who voiced the complaint feels ignored. Conversely, if you acknowledge the complaint and take steps to resolve it, you demonstrate your commitment to delivering an exceptional patient experience.

Key Benefits of Responding to Reviews:

- Demonstrate a high level of commitment to patient care
- Support transparency initiatives and build trust with healthcare consumers
- Provide actionable insight into recurring issues with providers or specific locations
- Enable operational improvements based on patient feedback and suggestions

Why Monitor and Respond to Reviews?

The simple answer to this question is all of them — good and bad. Best practice is to respond to 100 percent of negative reviews and at least 20 percent of positive reviews.³ Let's take a closer look at why this is important.

Positive Reviews

Research shows most reviews are positive. You don't need to respond to every positive review, but if someone takes time to write a detailed review praising various aspects of your system or practice, it's appropriate to thank them publicly.

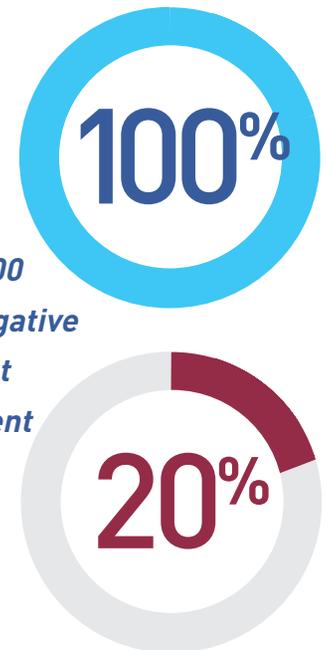
Engaging in the conversation enhances the human aspect of your quality of care. It instills goodwill with new prospects, who will see that you care about the patient experience and are willing to take the time to interact with your reviewers.

Negative Reviews

Responding to negative reviews is essential to the continued success of a doctor, practice or health system. Patients post complaints because they want a quick response, and it's often the easiest and most timely way to provide feedback.

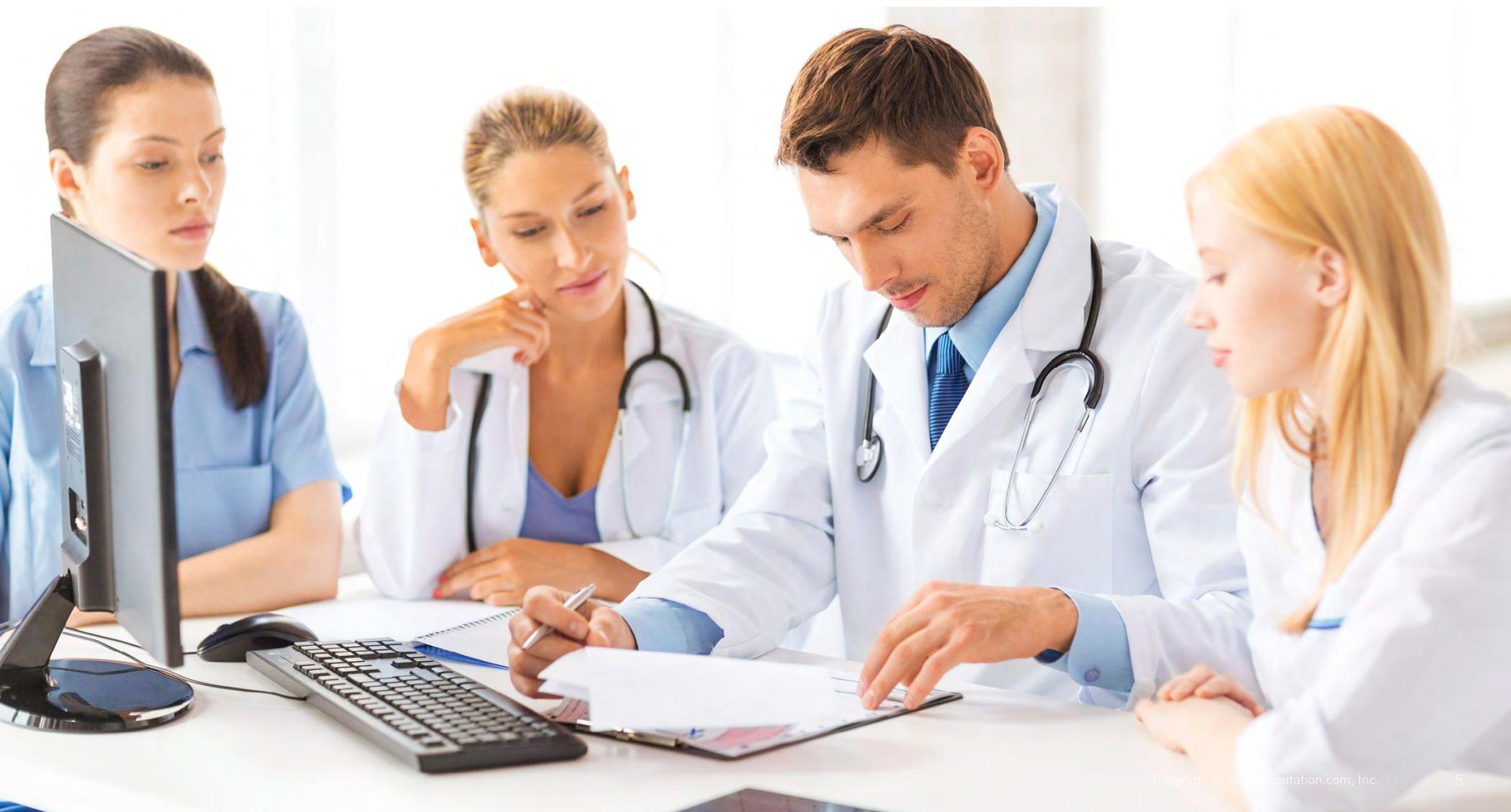
If reviews are left unanswered, it may look like you don't care about patients or their concerns. This can lead to additional negative feedback, which could drive potential new patients to other providers.

Respond to 100 percent of negative reviews and at least 20 percent of positive reviews.³



Reputation.com recommends responding within two to three business days. Automatic alerts within an Online Reputation Management platform enable you to stay on top of all reviews and ensure reviewers receive timely responses.

Be sure to keep patient privacy top of mind by providing reviewers with information about how to contact the practice manager or a patient relations specialist, rather than discussing the issue online. Work with your organization's patient relations team and your legal counsel to develop agreed upon responses that you can use to respond to most patient reviews, positive and negative.



Respond to Online Reviews in a HIPAA-Compliant Way

When responding to reviews, never disclose any protected health information (PHI). HIPAA prevents a "covered entity" (such as a doctor, clinic, practice or health system) from disclosing PHI without the patient's consent.

Here are some essential tips for responding to reviews in a HIPAA-compliant manner:

- 1) Respond with general policy or process information.** Never acknowledge the reviewer is or was a patient. Instead, work with your organization's patient relations and legal teams to develop responses to the reviewer's comments that address the complaint and provide the public with another perspective on the situation.

Complaint: *I arrived for my appointment on time, but spent 15 minutes filling out forms. That made my appointment a lot longer than it should have been.*

HIPAA-compliant response: *Thank you for your feedback. We try to keep convenience top of mind. However, it is our policy to ensure all necessary paperwork is complete prior to a patient's initial visit so that their care is appropriately coordinated.*

- 2) Accentuate the positive.** Post a response that demonstrates a commitment to improving the patient experience. For example, you can mention you're using feedback from online reviews to improve your practice. Taking this approach may help turn a negative opinion into a positive one.

- 3) Take the conversation offline.** Once a patient posts a review, you can contact that patient directly by phone, or invite them to call your patient relations office to discuss their concerns. During the private conversation, be sure to acknowledge the negative review and ask how you can help rectify the situation. If you choose to contact the patient by email, make sure you have proper signed consent forms for electronic communications before sending the email.

Complaint: *The doctor was rude and abrupt during our visit and I felt she didn't have time to answer my questions. I left crying.*

HIPAA-compliant response: *We sincerely apologize for your recent experience. Please call us at [phone number] so we can ensure a better experience next time. Thank you for your time.*

- 4) Don't ask patients to remove negative reviews:** This type of request could further alienate an already dissatisfied patient, and could potentially motivate the individual to post additional negative comments.

TAKE NOTE: Some doctors assume that if patients publicly disclose protected health information on their own, they are free to respond however they feel appropriate. However, this is a false assumption. Doctors are still responsible for upholding HIPAA regulations.

Perpetuate the Virtuous Cycle with Operational Insights

Responding to reviews improves your credibility, online and offline. It shows prospective patients that you care and are actively listening to patients. When you show prospective patients that you listen and respond to feedback, you encourage further customer engagement that often leads to more positive reviews.

What's more, negative comments may be justified — and useful. It's less likely for a doctor's medical advice or treatment recommendation to come under scrutiny; often, patient complaints are related to their experience with parking, front desk staff, billing, appointment scheduling, operating hours or bedside manner. Online reviews can provide information that helps doctors and staff correct these issues and improve the overall patient experience.

One large healthcare system mined data from online reviews to identify an issue with parking at a key facility. Armed with this insight, the organization addressed the parking issue, improving the overall patient experience.



Streamline and Simplify Responding to Online Reviews

Reputation.com helps you respond to online reviews professionally, promptly and in a HIPAA-compliant manner. With our all-in-one platform, you can:

- Respond to patient reviews directly from the Reputation.com dashboard.
- Automatically create a new customer case/ticket when a negative review is captured on a third-party review site, creating an efficient, closed-loop, patient feedback management process.
- Let us respond to reviews for you, relying on best practices and industry standards.
- Create templated responses for different scenarios, to ensure adherence to regulations and best practices.

¹ Pew Research

² [SoftwareAdvice](#)

³ Reputation.com



About Reputation.com

Reputation.com delivers the category-leading Online Reputation Management (ORM) platform for healthcare organizations with hundreds or thousands of providers.

Our intelligent platform helps healthcare organizations monitor review sites, generate more representative ratings, and drive recurring visits, admissions and revenue.

For more information, visit us at [reputation.com](https://www.reputation.com) or contact us at sales@reputation.com.