

Managing Your Practice's Online Reputation

It is no surprise Americans are turning to online resources to find physicians. Social networks such as Facebook allow for word-of-mouth recommendations to be shared easily, while sites like Healthgrades and Yelp enable patients to share both positive and negative experiences with physicians. According to a study by the Pew Research Center's Pew Internet & American Life project, 72 percent of internet users said they looked online for health information within the past year. With a significant number of Americans turning to the internet to look for and discuss physicians, managing the reputation of a physician or a practice online is critical.

Below are some tips on how to protect the reputation of both a physician and his or her practice.

Engage with Patients Online

Social media allows individuals to create a community to share information and build relationships. Having a digital presence, for instance, a Facebook page for the practice, allows physicians, with the help of staff members who control the page and its content, to reach and engage with patients when they are not in the office.

A strong online presence can help a practice strengthen its relationship with patients by serving as a trusted resource for news and information on relevant health conditions or medical breakthroughs, tips for living a healthy lifestyle or even positive staff announcements.

However, it's important to be cautious and remember that an online profile is a representation of the practice. The same ethical and professional



standards that are in place when it comes to communicating with patients remain. Practices can benefit from creating guidelines for social media posting to ensure that private patient information is always protected and that information posted is from reputable and credible sources.

Encourage Patient Reviews

Many websites exist where patients can share online reviews of physicians. While these publically shared reviews may sound like a scary thought, they shouldn't. According to DocSpot, 65 percent of reviewers give physicians the highest rating possible – meaning some physicians and practices are missing out on well-deserved accolades for their work.

And, these reviews are often not just based on the medical expertise of the physician, but the patient's entire experience with the practice –

providing information and insight from the patient's perspective on what does and does not work in the office.

While the threat of a negative review may be worrisome, it's important to remember that often, prospective patients are looking at the collective response rather than individual reviews that may not be credible. Just as with any consumer-oriented service, the larger the number of positive reviews, the better off a physician or practice will fare.

Monitor your Brand

If you're not aware of what people are saying about you, it's nearly impossible to get control or improve your reputation. Many sites populate profiles for doctors and allow for patient reviews, yet physicians and practices are unaware of what is being said. Actively monitoring and taking ownership of these profiles is a simple way to stay updated on what current and past patients may be saying about a physician or practice and address concerns if they arise.

Respond to Negative Feedback

Negative feedback – just as when received via the phone, email or in person – should not be ignored or deleted when delivered via social media or a website.

While the precise response to negative feedback will be unique to each instance, acknowledging and validating a patient's concerns in a professional and timely matter can diffuse an emotionally loaded situation. Even when it's necessary to take the conversation "offline" for privacy purposes, the willingness to listen, address and discuss feedback is often looked upon favorably.

Ask the Practice Management Expert

"Ask the Experts" is a question-and-answer forum featuring leading practice management experts.

Q: Patient satisfaction is very important to physicians and their practices. What prompted your practice to place a greater focus on patient satisfaction?

A: Patient satisfaction and comfort have always been a focus for us. If a patient isn't comfortable or has a bad experience, it reflects poorly on both the physician and the practice. Our goal is to keep our patients' office visits as stress free as possible. We want patients to leave confident in their decision to undergo surgery with our physicians.

Q: What have you had to do internally to ensure that there is an emphasis on patient satisfaction?

A: We are just one location in a larger group practice so we have two staff meetings each month to connect with staff from the other office to share our experiences and discuss "best practices." We also, as a staff, participate in "lunch and learns" with our physicians. During these times, the individual doctors will explain exactly what their specialty entails so all staff members have a complete understanding of what each physician does and his or her area of expertise. This ensures staff members have an inherent understanding of each physician's subspecialties and are able to direct patients to the appropriate physician.

Q: What strategies does your staff use to provide a good experience for your patients?

A: From the receptionist and biller to the operations manager and office manager, each patient contact is vital in creating a positive experience for a patient.

To ensure new patients feel comfortable with the process at our office, they receive all paperwork electronically prior to their visit which helps cut down the time they need to spend in the office. In addition, we try to alleviate the patient's responsibilities whenever possible by requesting medical documents on their behalf, interfacing with their insurance companies for pre-certification approvals and assisting with lab referrals when necessary.

In preparation for surgery, we ensure that all required pre-certification is complete and relevant information is shared with the patient regarding insurance coverage so they have full transparency into any uncovered costs. We also try to best accommodate patients' schedules, taking into account that patients may have challenges with work or childcare.

The patient experience doesn't end with the surgery – post-operative follow-up is equally as important as many patients are anxious and uncomfortable. Within 72 hours of a patient's surgery, our office contacts the patient to ensure that they are okay and to address any questions or concerns. Additionally, post-operative appointments are routinely scheduled with the patient prior to surgery to lessen the stress of having to coordinate schedules during recovery.

Q: One aspect of an appointment that can derail patient satisfaction is the wait time. How do you manage scheduling and your waiting room to avoid problems?

A: We know patients have busy lives and we try to be respectful of their time. We schedule one hour appointments, especially with initial consultations, to allow plenty of time for questions. On days when the schedule is extremely tight we work with the physicians to minimize downtime, maximize patient flow and manage administrative details. For example, if an appointment has extended past the usual one-hour time allotment and the next patient has arrived, a physician assistant will begin the consult to help manage the patient flow.

However, with physicians who are on-call and may have emergencies arise, it's not always possible to run on-time. With every new patient, we explain on the phone and in writing that there may be unforeseen circumstances that may delay or postpone an appointment. Patients often appreciate this and in most cases are comforted by the knowledge that, if needed, our physicians will spend an additional amount of time with them too! If the doctor is tied up off-site or running behind, we notify our patients and give them the option of coming in later in the day, rescheduling their appointment or scheduling a phone interview with the physician the same day if the patient has questions that require immediate attention.

I encourage my staff to put themselves in the patient's shoes and think about how they'd feel if their wait time was excessive and there was minimal to no communication regarding the reasons why.

Q: How do you deal with negative patient feedback?

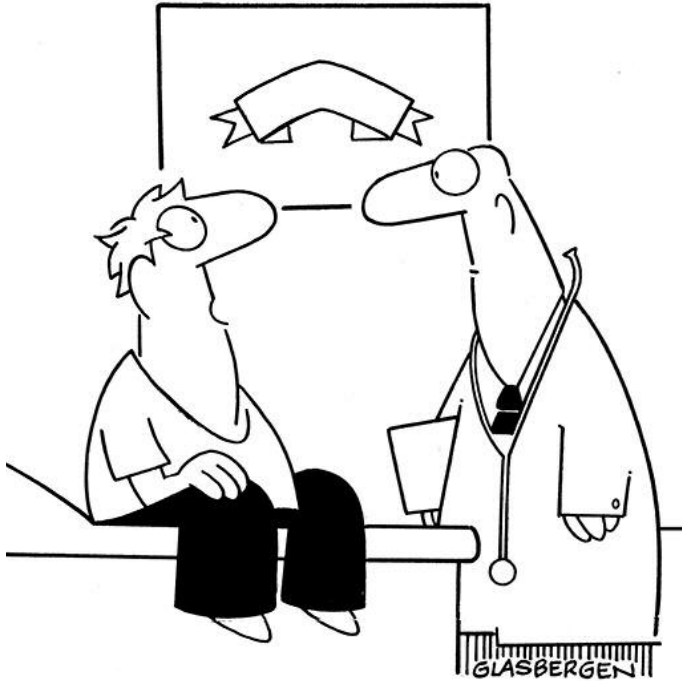
A: Patient satisfaction is the primary indicator for any practice. Negative feedback is viewed by our office as a quality indicator measurement. Although negative feedback may be uncomfortable to receive, it is a means of ensuring continuous quality improvement. More importantly, everyone deserves the opportunity to be heard. By following up with patients after an office or surgical visit, patients feel valued. Regardless of whether a patient has a suggestion, recommendation or is expressing a very positive experience, all feedback is shared with the staff and physicians as we take both positive and negative feedback seriously.

Our Expert

Kelly-Ann Phaloo-Beltran
Surgical Coordinator and
Interim Office Manager,
Neurosurgeons of New Jersey



For the past 18 months, Kelly-Ann Phaloo-Beltran has served as interim practice manager with Neurosurgeons of New Jersey's Livingston location, where she has been a member of staff for three years and serves as surgical coordinator. In her dual roles, Kelly-Ann is responsible for ensuring all aspects of the practice run smoothly and overseeing two staff members, as well as, handling all administrative duties related to the surgeries and procedures performed by Paul R. Gigante, MD, Luigi Bassani, MD and Ahsan Sattar, MD. Prior to joining Neurosurgeons of New Jersey, Kelly-Ann served as practice manager for a Primary Care group in Jersey City.



**"I already diagnosed myself on the Internet.
I'm only here for a second opinion."**

Save the Date for the 11th Annual OMA Celebration

**Wednesday, October 25, 2017
4 – 7 p.m.**

**RENAISSANCE WOODBRIDGE HOTEL
515 US Highway 1 South
Iselin, NJ 08830**

On Wednesday, October 25 from 4 to 7 p.m., the RWJBarnabas Health Office Managers Association will host its 11th Annual Celebration at the Renaissance Woodbridge Hotel.

Join the OMA for a fun-filled evening of networking and laughter. The event will feature a cocktail reception, dinner, networking with RWJBarnabas Health vendors and other OMA members. Attendees will be entertained by actor, writer and comedian Andrew Kennedy while he *promotes diversity through comedy*.

**Visit www.BarnabasHealthOfficeManagers.org
for more details as they become available.**

Be Healthy: Sit Less at Work "Sitting is the new smoking."

It's becoming widely accepted that prolonged sitting is detrimental to health. A large-scale survey by Australian researchers revealed that people who sit for 11 hours a day have a 40 percent increased risk of death, while other reports have linked long periods of sitting with an increased risk for diabetes, heart disease and cancer. Unfortunately, according to the American Heart Association, no amount of physical activity is enough to combat the dangers of sedentary behavior. But, sitting less and moving more may help.

The office, a place where most Americans spend a significant amount of their time sitting, can be a challenging place to get moving. But, with a few helpful hints and a little bit of effort and mindfulness, you can increase your movement without impacting your productivity.

Try a standing desk. A study by the National Institute of Public Health and University of Southern Denmark found that people who used adjustable-height desks, with sitting and standing options, sat about 71 minutes less per day than those who didn't use them and walked about 7 percent more.

No standing desk? No problem. Take calls standing up or, if you have an extra-long phone cord or enough privacy to make your calls on speaker phone, pace while you chat on the phone.

Walk to co-workers' desks. Don't rely on an interoffice phone system or email – walk over to your colleague's desk to discuss issues.

Watch your steps. Pedometers and fitness trackers can encourage you to move more by showing you the number of steps you've taken. Invite friends or colleagues to a step challenge for more motivation.

Set an alarm. Minutes can turn into hours when you're typing away on a computer screen. Set an alarm to remind yourself to get up and stretch your legs every 30 minutes or so.

Walk and talk. Rather than sitting around a desk or conference table to meet with colleagues, take your conversation outside for a walking meeting.

Take the stairs. Whenever you have the choice between an elevator or a few flights of stairs, opt for the stairs to get extra steps in.

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Corporate Corner

RWJBarnabas Health and Rutgers University Announce New Partnership Creating the State's Premier Academic Health Care System

RWJBarnabas Health and Rutgers University recently announced plans to partner and create the state's largest academic health care system dedicated to providing high-quality patient care, leading-edge research and world-class health and medical education that will transform and advance health care in New Jersey.

The new venture will enhance the delivery and accessibility of evidence-based health care across the state; boost the recruitment of prominent academic, research and clinical practitioners; and strengthen the advancement of health science innovation and education.

This collaboration aligns RWJBarnabas Health, New Jersey's largest health care system; Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey; and Rutgers Health Group -- a faculty practice of approximately 1,000 Rutgers-employed physicians, dentists, psychologists, nurses, pharmacists and other health care professionals. This alliance will result in a multi-specialty group comprised of more than 2,500 practitioners – one of the largest medical groups in the country.

The new collaboration will align RWJBarnabas Health with Rutgers' education, research and clinical activities, including those at the Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey and Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care.

Patients throughout New Jersey will benefit from increased access to providers across disciplines, including physicians, nurses, dentists, physician assistants, pharmacists, social workers, and behavioral health and addiction professionals. Patients will eventually have access to the newly developed centers of excellence, including groundbreaking medical research and clinical innovation, and to clinicians who are leading scholars and faculty in their fields.