

Health Information Compliance Alert

Revenue Booster: Keep a Close Eye on Your Social Media Footprint

Tip: Remember the rules of patient engagement and HIPAA.

In today's healthcare market, offering up your opinion is easy and expected, and tech-savvy patients often post their critiques before they leave the examination room. It's all well and good when the feedback is positive, but everyone has a bad day, including doctors. And that's when negative results can be detrimental to your practice's checkbook.

Caveat: However despite the shortcomings of digital profiles, they are essential, drive revenue, allow for greater local and national visibility, and make you a more viable healthcare provider. Today's market demands that you cultivate a presence online.

Register These Provider-Specific Offerings

Many online resources offer patients the opportunity to match their needs with providers in their geographic area and see what past patients have to say about these specialists. Some of the sites offer physicians free profile options and the opportunity to respond to negative comments, update practice information and services, and handle outreach efforts.

Review the top provider search engines:

- **Medicare's Physician Compare:** The **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** (CMS) answer to review sites, Physician Compare, originated in 2010 and was mandated by the Affordable Care Act (ACA), and it's intertwined with MACRA initiatives, too. This federal offering helps consumers "make informed choices about the healthcare they receive through Medicare," CMS says in its guidance. Quality-measures data, patient satisfaction information, and more combine with basic background and ownership details from the Medicare Provider Enrollment, Chain, and Ownership System (PECOS) to inform patients about Medicare providers and suppliers in their community.

Top tip: Physician Compare "incentivizes clinicians to maximize their performance by making performance information publicly available," reminds CMS.

- **Private Payer Provider Look-Ups:** If you have an arrangement with private insurers like **United-Healthcare** and **Aetna**, you already know your credentials and practice details are available for patients to peruse on their sites. However, a quick scroll through the provider search engines highlights that these organizations utilize star-ratings systems similar to other healthcare sites.
- **ZocDoc:** The company offers a website and an app, which allows people to search for a physician by specialty, condition, procedure, doctor name, zip code or city, and insurance type.

Top tip: You can also list your practice on ZocDoc to increase your reach and have a bigger hand in shaping your online presence.

- **WebMD:** Potential patients can find physicians by name, specialty, condition, procedure, or location, including top metropolitan areas, as well as directories for pharmacies, insurance, and hospitals (and a lot of other information, which has probably affected exam room conversations for physicians for years).
- **Healthgrades:** People can utilize this website to search physicians, specialty, condition, procedure, or location. There's a new "National Health Index" that spotlights a list of the 25 cities that "are getting healthcare right," Healthgrades says on its website.

Top tip: You can claim a free profile for your practice.

- **RateMDs:** This website boasts 2.6 million ratings; people can search by physician (name and gender), specialty, and location.

Top tip: RateMDs also allows you to claim a "doctor profile" on its site.

- **Care Dash:** This site is fairly new, meaning you could make an outside impact on the site if you can manage to establish a presence with more than a couple ratings. People can search via their personal address or zip code, as well as hospital, specialty, provider name, or practice.

Top tip: Provider profiles are available on this site.

- **Vitals.com:** This company offers a free online search tool to connect patients with doctors, as well as a pay platform that provides extra information on how your benefits and care interact, as well as a program employers can buy into to nudge their employees toward "lower-cost, high-quality" choices in their healthcare decisions, according to the Vitals website. The company's two pay platforms offer cash rewards to users as motivation to choose affordable healthcare. The services this company offers are not geared toward providers, but you can still check in on what people are saying about you.

Remember: It's always a good idea to appoint a staff member to be in charge of the weekly and monthly audit of online resources and social media output. This allows your practice to keep its digital footprint in check, assuring compliance and rectifying falsehoods or errors in a timely manner all while promoting your business.

Monitor Service-Rating Sites Often

Consumers utilize ratings systems for the movies they see, the places they shop, and the food they eat - so, it's no surprise that they check stats on their healthcare providers before coming in for a visit. Check and search these sites for patients' postings:

- **Yelp:** People can use this ubiquitous service-ratings site to read (or post) reviews on doctors, as well as restaurants and hair salons. The nonhealthcare-focus means that the search parameters are a little different, by location or payment type, or whether a practice sees patients by appointment only.
- **Angie's List:** This site requires membership but offers users a more in-depth look at services. Their members review doctors and dentists based on "various aspects of care, including availability, office environment, punctuality, staff friendliness, bedside manner, communication, effectiveness of treatment, and billing and administration," according to the Angie's List website.
- **Google Reviews:** If a potential patient hears about your practice from a friend or finds word of it elsewhere and Googles your practice specifically, your address and hours will pop up, as well as a summary of aggregated reviews on other sites. "You can't only rely on Google Reviews anymore, you need to make sure your patients are spreading the love across all the review sites prospective patients might consider," says **Jessie Pressman**, director of reputation management at **People & Practice**, a physician-focused digital marketing company in New York City, in a blog post.
- **Facebook:** Many people spend a lot of time on Facebook, and utilize it for everything word of mouth. You may want to consider establishing a practice business presence here, to make sure patients can find accurate information about your location and hours, as they may look for information here before they look for your website or at review sites. The platform encourages the use of photos and the production of content, so it will be tempting to engage directly with patients. Be very wary of potential landmines via HIPAA violations.

Important: "Social media is the chosen means of communication, sourcing and learning for billions of people worldwide," says **Howard Luks, MD**, principal with **Simplur, LLC**. "Medical practices understand this and may feel there is a rush to jumping onboard."

Luks warns against making any rash decisions. "The risk is that a practice will rush to implement a social media strategy, but they spend very little time determining what their goals are, what their message is, and exactly how they're going to try to get that message to resonate," he acknowledges.

Bottom line: Before you invest in social media, assess the risks, do your research, and more importantly, review both your state's laws and HIPAA before engaging in online self-promotion.