

# YOU GOT HIT WITH A SLEW OF REALLY BAD REVIEWS... WHAT NOW?

Bad reviews happen to good doctors. Our experts share tips on how to rise above.



## DIAL DOWN THE EMOTION

Bad reviews can happen to good doctors. Don't panic. Read them objectively and take the emotion out of it. First try to determine if the negative comments are real and from patients you can identify. For those, consider reaching out to the patient directly (not online) to address their complaints and try to turn them around. Offer the patient the opportunity to come back to discuss their issues.

For anonymous or fake negative reviews, you do not have much recourse. *Do not* respond in anger or use words that are a tacit acknowledgement of a doctor-patient relationship. I suggest a vague response like this to demonstrate that you take complaints seriously, "We are sorry to learn of your experience. If you are a real patient of our practice, please feel free to reach out to us directly so that we may address these issues. Joan Smith, Practice Manager, JSmith@aestheticpractice.com."

The best way to circumvent negative reviews is to invest in a comprehensive program to generate positive reviews by asking happy patients to write about you. If some of the criticisms are legitimate, I would also suggest that you review how your practice treats patients, identify areas that need improvement, and strive to do better.

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## GET IN FRONT OF THE PROBLEM

First, assess the situation. Are the reviews legitimate or are they being posted by a competitor or an out-of-touch patient? Second, respond to the reviews appropriately. If the review is legitimate, own up to your shortcomings and respond. Always post a heartfelt response on the review site asking the patient to contact you directly. Consumers expect to see some bad reviews and they want

to know how the practice responds to the negative feedback. An immediate reply on the site, such as below, can work wonders for your online reputation.

"Thank you for your comments and feedback. We are very sorry to learn about your poor experience at our practice. Our goal is to create a great environment for our patients, and we will work hard to address your concerns. Please contact me directly at (619) 555-1212 so that I personally can learn more about your concerns."

Also, if you can determine who the patient is from the content of the reviews, contact him or her directly by phone. Often, the patient will remove the negative comments once you have listened to their concerns.

If the reviews are not legitimate, start by writing to the review sites outlining how the review violates their Terms of Service (TOS). TOS violations typically include posts by former employees, racist or degrading comments, and/or personal attacks. Be sure to include the letters "TOS" in your communication. These letters will often elicit a human, as opposed to an automated, response to your concern.

Third, the best strategy to offset negative reviews is to have a steady stream of positive reviews. The practice should have a system to regularly solicit positive reviews across a range of review sites. Too many practices concentrate on just two or three sites, which is a big mistake.

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## LOOK IN THE MIRROR

It's easy to jump to conclusions when you see a number of bad reviews posted online, whether they be about you, your team, or your practice overall. We always advise our clients to do the following:

Stop and take a deep breath. Never respond hotheaded!

Evaluate internally what the opportunity



for improvement truly is, and use this to take a look in the proverbial mirror. For example, have several people written about your rude front desk team? It could be time for training and a series of mystery shoppers!

Did a number of people tell you that they were non-responders to certain injectables? Use this to do an internal check and make sure that you didn't get a bad batch in your last order. Address items internally, especially if more than one person brings something to your attention.

When responding, make sure that you aren't confirming whether or not the person is/was a patient. HIPAA still applies, even on the Internet and even when someone provokes you. Be sure to talk about internal policies and not in direct relation to any particular patient.

Invite the person to give your office a call directly, letting them know you would be more than happy to speak with them personally about how to resolve the issue.

Finally, if you suspect that the person on the other end of the computer may not truly exist (i.e. they're a competitor

or an angry former employee with a fake account), let the review site know this now. ■

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