

Bad Online Reviews and How to Respond to Them



It is important to address **every** online review – good or bad – publicly so that others reading the review will know you are responsive to patient communication and concerns.

Here's How to Respond

Here are some simple steps to addressing a bad review, potentially resolving the patient's complaint and showing possible future patients how you deal with patient concerns.

Don't get bent out of shape.

As much as we want to think that we do the best we can for every patient, we do make mistakes. I spoke with a patient recently and told her the practice had failed to send her prescription in and she was dumbfounded. "You mean you are actually admitting you made a mistake?" she said "That's so refreshing." We will all make mistakes, and we all must own them.

Read it. Go away. Come back and read it again.

First blush reads can be deceiving because we are instantly on the defensive. All healthcare is under the microscope and we are all peddling so hard to keep up that it's easy to feel that we are doing everything we can and resent anyone who thinks we could do better. If you let it go for 24 hours, when you come back and read it a again, it could read differently and may be not as harsh as we originally perceived it to be.

Address the online review and include:

- An **apology** acknowledging that the patient was

dissatisfied – regardless of the specifics or what you cautioned them about, you want patients to know you do not want them to be dissatisfied. This is not necessarily to admit that you did something “wrong”, but that if the patient feels something went wrong, you want to acknowledge their feelings and address them. This is not the forum to say “we told you this might happen...”

- **Reassurance** that patient care is the top priority in your practice.
- An **invitation** to contact the practice administrator to discuss the issue in more detail and review if anything could have been done differently. Include a phone number and email.
- **Edit, edit, edit.** Write it, let it sit for awhile, and come back and see if it reads the way you want it to. Have others read it and give their opinions. Less is often more when responding to a bad review.

Keep a copy of the online review and your response

Share with employees at a staff meeting. Make it a customer service teaching moment.

Contact the Patient

If you know who wrote the online review, contact the patient with an offer to discuss over the phone or face-to-face.

Keep in mind that the most important thing is to take the public sting out of the review by responding in an open, calm and compassionate way.

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12 Ways to Supercharge Your Practice in 2012: #3 Create a Customer Service Culture

Is Your Practice Struggling?

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When do you think about customer service in your practice?

When things start heading downhill? You overhear something that surprises you, complaints seem to be on the rise and you think, “time for another customer service seminar.”

The problem with this, of course, is that customer service is a day-to-day relationship. If you wait until you recognize the signs of things heading in the wrong direction, it could be too late. Just like other relationships, customer service in your practice needs consistent attention and creativity to keep things fresh and in the forefront of everyone’s mind. Just like other relationships, customer service is a living thing that needs care and feeding.

Here is what Customer Service isn’t:

- A script.
- Regional casual endearments like honey, darlin’ or sugar.
- Talking to another employee about something unrelated to the patient in front of the patient.
- Telling the patient the physician is delayed due to an

emergency when he's late because_____. (fill in your own answer)

- Having patients sign in, then shouting out to the waiting area for the patient to come back up to check in.
- Leaving patients in the examining room for longer than 15 minutes without checking in on them and giving them an update.
- Bad customer service means patients may not come back, they may tell 10 or more people about their experience and they'll probably give your practice a very bad review on Twitter, Facebook, Yelp, Angie's List, HealthGrades and 10 other rating sites.

Here is what Customer Service is:

- Seeing people as individuals and remembering something about each one of them (yes, you probably will have to write it down to remember it, but I'm sure your computer system has some place to write a note.)
- Setting the practice thermostats to a comfortable level for the patients, not the staff. If you can't get the thermostat to behave, tell every patient that the office is chilly and to bring a sweater or jacket. Buy a refurbished blanket warmer. Everyone loves a warm blanket!
- Inviting patients to roundtables to tell you what they like and don't like about a practice. Don't forget to invite the patients who are really, really mad at the practice – they give you the best information and can become your greatest advocates.
- Telling patients when they call for their first appointment that the doctor always runs late and that no matter what appointment time they get, they should always come 30 minutes later. (Yes, you could try to retrain the physician, but I've never been able to, have you?)

- Excellent customer service means patients will feel good about coming back, they may tell 3 or more people about their experience and they might even give your practice a very good review on Twitter, Facebook, Yelp, Angie's List, HealthGrades and 10 other rating sites.

Customer Service is WHATEVER MAKES PEOPLE FEEL BETTER.

It is anything from saying "I'm sorry we didn't do the best that we could have for you," to providing a drink or a place to have a private conversation. We don't have to be perfect, we just have to have the desire to provide the perfect experience for each patient. Compassion is having no preconceptions about the other person and being willing to serve the other person's needs regardless of your own feelings about the person. It is taking "you" out of the equation.

Try this exercise with your staff. Tell them that none of the patients coming through the door today will be paying, except for one person. That one person will be paying for all the patients in your practice today, and that one person will make it possible for the practice to stay open and for the staff to receive their paychecks. However, no one will know which person is the one that is paying for everyone. How will the staff treat the patients today?

How do you create a culture of service in your practice?

1. **Your physicians model it.** The manager can be the most service-oriented person in the universe, but if the physicians don't model it, it's all over. The physicians must be respectful. (Dear physicians, please don't stand outside exam rooms and tell jokes, or talk to drug reps or talk about other patients because I have never met

the exam room wall that you can't hear right through. You upset the patients and make the staff uncomfortable.)

2. **You model it.** You prioritize patient complaints by meeting with patients and speaking with patients when they call. [You apologize.](#) You investigate their concerns.
3. **You recruit for it.** You tell applicants that this practice exists to be of service to others, and if that is not a concept they are comfortable with, this is not the job for them. If they want to be of service to others, ask them for some examples of how they have been of service in previous jobs and what they would intend to do here.
4. **You acknowledge good customer service** when you see it or hear about it from others. You may have a reward program in your practice for excellent customer service. You publish compliments about customer service in your newsletter or on a staff bulletin board.
5. **You establish clear expectations.** Speak respectfully to all people in the practice. Keep voices down. Smile. Patients often remember the "hello" and the "good-bye" the most – make them count. Be confidential. LISTEN and do not think you already know what every patient is going to say. [Read this.](#)
6. **You talk about it** in staff meetings. Someone told me once that there are only two reasons why people get angry – they're either hurt or they're scared. That has stayed with me for a long time. Teach employees to diffuse situations, to apologize sincerely, and help them by role playing the right answers to patients who are angry or disappointed or sick. Make sure everyone knows that patients have lots of choices for healthcare.
7. **You measure patient satisfaction.** You can measure it in a BIG WAY or in a small way, but start to measure it. There are a number of very fine organizations who will develop custom patient satisfaction forms for you,

distribute them, collate them and interpret them for you and get you started on the road to improvement. You can also brainstorm with your team about a customer service focus each month of the year, and see what improvement gets the most comments from patients. Try a greeter in the reception area, calling every patient who had a sick visit the previous day to check on their progress, a nurse visiting your patients in the hospital (not cared for by you), a limited house call schedule – they can be little things or big things – recipes for patients to take home, patient voting on a big ballot for the magazines they'd like to see in your waiting area and exam rooms...the ideas are endless.

What will you do this year to change customer service at your practice?

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How to Ask Your Patients to Leave Positive Feedback for You Online

Asking for feedback can be tough.

Asking for feedback as a physician or care provider is unexplored territory for most practices.

My primary care provider has a simple and effective way to ask

patients to leave feedback online.

At the checkout desk is a small pile of papers that look like this:



Note that the paper is simple, not slick, and the wording is humble. No one at the practice has ever called my attention to the little pile of papers.

Here is the text of the form:

PRACTICE NAME

Dear Sir/Madam:

Hope you received satisfying care at PRACTICE NAME.

We are trying to raise online visibility of PRACTICE NAME and would like to request you to write a short review of your experience.

You can write a review at Google.

1. Please go to <http://maps.google.com>
2. Search for "PRACTICE NAME CITY STATE"
3. Click on "more info"
4. Click on "Write a review" link

We sincerely appreciate your assistance.

DR. SMITH DR. JONES DR. BLACK

You could also direct patients to:

- Yelp
- Angie's List

- Your Facebook page
- Any physician evaluation website

Just don't ask patients to place comments on ALL these places. Choose one location at a time.

Don't fear negative comments. They will happen because no one is perfect. What will set you apart from others is your ability to answer concerns and resolve issues in a real way.

Spotted! Amazing Customer Service at My Dentist's Office

☒ The older I get, the more I dislike going to the dentist. I don't know if it has to do with the increasing number of root canals and crowns I've needed, or if it has to do with becoming more controlling as I age and feeling totally out of control in the dentist's chair.

Regardless of my feelings about going to the dentist, I had a surprising customer service experience at my new dentist's office recently. I had been putting off finding a new dentist since we moved to the big city over a year ago. It became urgent to find one when I started having a sensitive tooth that made me shriek (inwardly) every time I drank or ate something cold.

I did my research: asked people, went online to [Yelp](#) and tried to discover what I could about the local dentists. I also needed to find a dentist in my insurance network. I found the

one that seemed to fit, called, made the appointment, and showed up at the appointed time after receiving a nice email reminder.

The receptionist greeted me, introduced herself and SHOOK MY HAND. I had barely sat down with my clipboard of forms to complete before the clinic door flew open and the dental assistant called me. She introduced herself and SHOOK MY HAND. She said we would deal with the paperwork as time allowed. She talked to me about x-rays, and asked if she could take new films and a dental impression. She asked about my former dentist in another state, and when I couldn't remember his name, the receptionist returned with a page of names from the Internet and asked me if anything looked familiar.

The dentist came right in after the x-rays, surprisingly did not shake my hand, but proceeded to look in my mouth carefully, gently, and asked lots of questions. Then he discussed a tentative care plan with me, and when we agreed, he turned me back over to the assistant for some remedial gum care training. Magically, I completed my paperwork by the time I was done in the chair.

I stepped to the check-out desk feeling confident that my dental health was in very good hands. Then the receptionist (whom I found out later was the dentist's wife) had some information for me about what the care plan would cost. She had called my insurance company and found out what my plan would cover and what I would be paying out of pocket. She explained it beautifully and I was so impressed I asked her for some advice about the financial counseling program I am starting in my practice. She had some interesting insights to share.

To Recap:

1. Got positive feedback on dentist online.

2. Was able to get an appointment within a week.
3. Got an email reminder.
4. Receptionist and dental assistant shook my hand.
5. Dentist was gentle and talked things over with me.
6. Receptionist explained my insurance plan clearly and what I would owe, and gave me choices for scheduling services.
7. I felt cared for, respected, and that they were happy to have my business.

Would your patients say the same about a visit to your practice?