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Welcome to The Governance Institute's E-Briefings!

This newsletter is designed to inform you about new research and expert opinions in the area of hospital and health system governance, as well as to update you on services and events at The Governance Institute.

Physician Exposé: The Benefits of Embracing Transparency

By Andrew Ibbotson and Kayla Lounsbery, National Research Corporation

A growing number of hospital systems in the United States are doing the unthinkable. They are answering the call for greater transparency in the healthcare industry by publishing uncensored patient ratings and reviews about their doctors on their own Web site. But, is this what healthcare consumers are craving? What do hospitals and health systems have to gain from such an endeavor? And, is this path to increased consumer transparency even feasible for most hospitals?

Consumers Love Online Ratings and Reviews and So Does Google

You look at ratings. You know how many stars the hotel for your upcoming vacation has. You've chosen restaurants in new cities using Yelp, Urbanspoon, or TripAdvisor. What's more, you trust these online reviews, as much as you trust the advice of friends and family—or at least 88 percent of consumers say they do.¹ You seek out the opinions of those who have gone before you because you want the best experience possible. Why wouldn't this apply to healthcare?

Traditionally healthcare has been slow to adopt trends from other industries; this isn't news to any of us. But the rise of consumerism is impossible to ignore, even for healthcare. Today, 37 percent of patients reported avoiding physicians because of negative reviews they saw online and 33 percent of patients who used online reviews chose their doctor based solely on positive reviews.² Consumers are looking at you with a discerning

¹ Local Consumer Review Survey 2014, BrightLocal.

² "Study Examines Public Awareness, Use of Online Physician Rating Sites," *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, February 18, 2014.

eye and you have more power than you may realize to control what they find.

Consumers aren't the only fans of online ratings and reviews. Google, the search engine capturing over 67 percent of all online search traffic,³ puts great stock in them as well. Web sites with the most reviews almost always find themselves at the top of search engine results, because consumers are looking for the kinds of language other consumers used in their reviews: "Where can I find the best doctor? Where can I get the best care?" With the vast majority of healthcare consumers turning to search before making an appointment, it's imperative to be at the top of those search engine results to drive traffic to your Web site and then turn those consumers into patients.

Hospitals and Health Systems Have Much to Gain by "Baring It All"

It's a scary prospect for physicians and healthcare executives, putting patient comments out there for the world to see. But a scarier prospect still is doing nothing, leaving the reputation of your healthcare organization and providers in the hands of someone else. Physician ratings on third-party doctor ratings Web sites are typically based on less than 10 reviews per physician. With such a small sample size, one negative review can severely damage a doctor's overall rating and take months or years to repair.

The good news is that you're already sitting on a wealth of untapped ratings and reviews for your organization and providers—trapped within your

³ "comScore Releases August 2014 U.S. Search Engine Rankings," comScore, Inc., September 17, 2014.

patient experience survey data. And because the sample size is so much bigger, you can quickly paint a far more accurate—and likely more positive—picture of the kind of care you provide.

The patient feedback you collect is unique, relevant, and current; exactly the kind of content consumers in search of a healthcare provider are looking for—and always ranks very highly with search engines like Google. Simply put, publishing provider reviews on your Web site will drive search engine results: bringing your providers to the top of the list and increasing traffic to your Web site, leading to more conversions and appointments.

Any Hospital or System Can Do This and It's Best to Be First

Any great movement requires pioneers. The University of Utah Health Care was the first to use its patient experience data to publish doctor ratings and patient comments on its Web site. Like all pioneers, it walked a hard path. The organization built its solution from the ground up, using internal resources. It took them more than two years to accomplish. While the benefits University of Utah Health Care is experiencing from the investment are certainly worth their efforts, not every hospital or system has the time nor resources to dedicate to the cause, especially when you consider the additional work required to maintain and evolve the solution over time.

Piedmont Healthcare took a different approach. It licensed a purpose-built reputation management software platform to automate the process. Its results were fast and impressive. Piedmont required only two months to implement the solution and, within 30 days of adding this valuable content to its physician profile pages, nearly 90 percent of Piedmont's physician profiles jumped to the top spot in Google's search results when searching for a physician by name. By comparison, prior to implementing this solution, Piedmont's Web site

only claimed the top spot for about 40 percent of Piedmont physicians.

When considering Piedmont's top 100 most visited physician profiles, Piedmont saw on average a 43 percent increase in both page views and unique visitors just one month after implementing this solution. Over the first six months, the increase in search engine rankings more than doubled traffic to Piedmont's Web site. Today, the overall average Google page rank for Piedmont profiles is 1.2.

There are currently only a handful of hospitals and health systems publishing their own patient ratings and reviews. This is a trend that's rapidly gaining momentum within the healthcare industry. By being the first in your market to put provider ratings front and center, you have a chance to establish trust and gain loyal customers before competing providers can get a word in edgewise.

What's the Value of Embracing Transparency?

Taking a step toward transparency by publishing reviews and ratings from your patients on your organization's Web site is an investment. It's an investment in your brand image. It's an investment in your physicians. And it's an investment in your patients.

While it's nearly impossible to put a price tag on your hospital or system's good name, the value of a patient is much more easily quantified. The lifetime household healthcare expenditure is estimated to be more than \$1.5 million for hospitals and over \$1 million for physician-related expenses, according to statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau. How many new patients—or really how few—does it take to make investing in transparency worth it?

It *pays* to put your best foot forward.

The Governance Institute thanks Andrew Ibbotson, Vice President, Reputation, and Kayla Lounsbery, Marketing Manager, at National Research Corporation, for contributing this article. To learn more about the National Research Reputation solution visit www.nationalresearch.com/reputation or call (800) 388-4264.