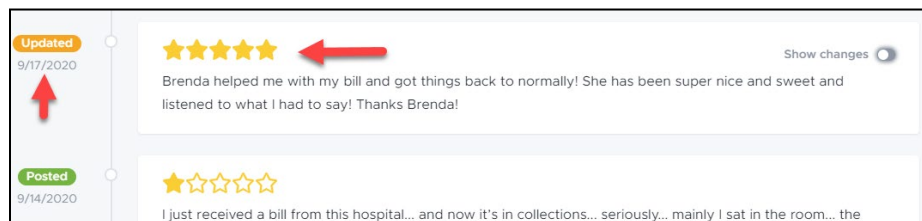


Responding to reviews in healthcare

There are many articles online that address responding to reviews. However, most aren't written with healthcare and its special compliance considerations in mind. And though communication or reputation specialists often know how best to respond, self-doubt can creep in after senior leaders question you, or after you complete an annual compliance course. No one wants to be the cause of a HIPAA-violation fine!

Still, it's not as complicated as it may seem—if you don't include protected health information (PHI) in your response. On top of that, responding is an important part of a proactive reputation-management strategy, so whether your reviews are positive or negative, **respond**. Here are some reasons why:

1. Google encourages responding; therefore, its ranking algorithm can be influenced by responses to reviews.
2. Responding is an opportunity to build trust and credibility with your patients and consumers.
3. Responding is an opportunity to turn a negative review into a positive review!



A real example of a negative review that was recovered!

It's Personal

Healthcare is personal. It can be a matter of life or death. In such cases, patients want a care provider they trust, and an acute or post-acute facility they can feel good about. Going to a shop that doesn't have a perfect rating is a low-risk gamble. But when selecting a surgeon, or a care facility for your parent, do you want someone who only has two out of five stars?

In healthcare, then, when someone takes the time to leave a review, there's emotion behind it. Keep that in mind when you're writing your responses. You want to be empathetic, not antagonistic. Ideally, you want the response to be as personal as the review was. Think about how you want your patients and customers to feel after an experience bill with your organization. Knowing an actual human being has read, understood, and responded to their feedback feels better to consumers than seeing the same response on every comment.

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

As much as we wish bad reviews didn't exist, they are inevitable—no one is perfect 100% of the time. For those who recognize this, negative reviews are an opportunity to respond and build trust while displaying compassion. The best way to address both good and bad reviews is to respond genuinely to them. Let the reviewer know you're interested in their feedback.

With that in mind, it's important to recognize that while responding to good and bad reviews is important, responding to ugly, accusatory reviews is a losing game. We've all seen them: the person who wants to name-call, make false accusations, or hold a personal issue against a provider or medical facility that has nothing to do with the care or experience they had. These people seek no resolution; they only hope to inflame others and cause scandal.

Overtly ugly reviews should be reported to Google or the applicable review site. Most review sites have standards or site-usage policies that prohibit defamatory language, personal attacks, and so forth. Many sites allow you to report a review and ask to have it removed if it violates those policies.

This is an excerpt from Google's policy:

Contributions must be based on real experiences and information. Deliberately fake content, copied or stolen photos, off-topic reviews, defamatory language, personal attacks, and unnecessary or incorrect content are all in violation of our policy. If you see this behavior, please report it.

That being said, otherwise engaging with reviewers who post vulgar or nasty attacks generally doesn't go well—so ignore the ugly reviews if you can. If there are multiple such comments that relate to a public-relations crisis that you need to address, work with your communications and legal departments to develop a short statement, complete with facts, to post in response. Aside from that, do not engage with these reviewers. Post the one carefully crafted response, then be done.

Remember Your Voice

Before crafting any response, think of the tone of your brand voice. Are you a smaller community hospital or physician practice, in an area where everyone knows everyone? If so, your approach may be warmer and more familiar than that of a larger metropolitan health system. A large system's brand voice might be more formal or scientific, while remaining compassionate. Remember, your responses reflect on your brand and shape your reputation.

It's also important to try to avoid using the same content every time. Utilize the NRC Health smart response library in your Monitor platform to list out some response variations and to help save time on crafting new copy for each response.

Example, Please

NRC Health is often asked, “What are the best review responses you’ve seen?” Following are some real examples, with editorial commentary added.

The Good

Hospital review

Such talented and wonderful staff made my hospital stay bearable. They truly care about their patients. We are fortunate to have a Healthcare facility of this caliber in our area!

Response to review

Hi, <name>. Thank you so much for taking the time to post a positive review and for choosing [us]!

Editorial

This response is appreciative, acknowledges that the person’s time is valuable, and, though it is generic, feels personal. For an even shorter response: *Hi <name>, thanks for sharing your positive feedback! Or if you don’t have time to personalize: Thank you for taking the time to leave a review. We appreciate your feedback and are pleased to hear you had a good experience!*

The Bad

Provider review

I wouldn’t give her any stars if I could. She attempted to do a procedure on me with no consultation first or anesthesia...Barbaric is what it felt like. I’m contemplating a lawsuit. I later read this procedure is always done under anesthesia. Think twice before [asking] for her!

Response to review

Hello, <name>. We are disappointed to hear that you had a negative experience during your visit. Please reach out to our Patient Experience Representative at 555-555-5057 so we may investigate your concerns further. Thank you.

Editorial

Firstly, this response does not apologize or say sorry, which is a good thing. (We’ve encountered general counsel and risk officers who advise providers not to make any comment that could be construed as an admission of a mistake.) Secondly, it provides a phone number to use to reach a person—not a recording. Lastly, it indicates that an action will be taken. All in all, this response lets the reviewer know that their voice is being heard. An additional suggestion would be to also offer an email option to use to contact the Patient Experience Representative.

The Ugly

Provider review

We would give NEGATIVE stars if given the option. This provider is a train wreck! Don't know why Mother had to co-pay to hear about his transgender "journey" while she sit in his office sick and suffering.....Even when I showed him, her, him (all certificates on the wall are written to [male name], but this "Dr." was clearly in drag.... My Mom is in her 80's, she was very upset.

Response to review

[None.]

Editorial

This review was flagged to Healthgrades, and they removed the comment but left the star rating intact.

Hospital review

You hire criminals! Any hospital that allows a person like John Doe to be around my child will never get my business again and I'm telling all my friends to spread the word.

Response to review

Hi, <name>. We are aware of the blog post claiming that an individual being sought by the police is employed by XYZ Medical Center. The person named in the post does not work at XYZMC. Please help us clear up this misinformation wherever you see it. We have high standards for our team and the safety of all those we serve.

Editorial

This example is the exception to the "do not respond" recommendation, because the review is based on inaccurate information, and the response expresses the organization's desire to stop the spread of such falsehoods. The response was approved by internal senior leaders, and the exact same reply was used for all reviewer comments related to this topic. This was a great approach to take in trying to stop the rapid spread of misinformation.

Remember

In addition to contributing to your search ranking, your review responses are often the first experience a consumer has with your organization when they're searching for a health service. Consequently, they are responsible for setting the right tone. Take the opportunity to engage and build your organization's reputation.