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Health Care Providers: Top Ten Tips for Responding to Social Media Reviews

Mary B. Ramsay, Associate | mramsay@shumaker.com | 843.996.1918
Grant P. Dearborn, Senior Attorney | gdearborn@shumaker.com | 813.227.2223



As more people go online to research products and services, online reputation management has become increasingly relevant for physicians and clinicians. Online reputation management often involves addressing reviews on sites like Yelp, Google, Facebook, and other social media platforms.

Here are Shumaker's Top Ten Tips for responding to Social Media Reviews:

- 1. Do NOT acknowledge that the reviewer is a patient.** HIPAA prevents a provider from disclosing any information about a patient without the patient's permission, including acknowledging the person is in fact a patient. A patient's own disclosure is not permission for the provider to disclose anything.
- 2. See #1 Above!**
- 3. Designate a Social Media Officer.** One person who has the authority to post on the practice's social media accounts to ensure HIPAA compliance and a consistent response. It is advisable to have sign off by a second person to ensure that no response is emotional or could be mistaken.
- 4. Monitor Online Reviews.** The Social Media Officer is responsible for monitoring online reviews on a regular basis and determining, if necessary, how to respond on behalf of the provider.
- 5. Establish a Procedure for Investigating Negative Reviews.** Internally confirm if the reviewer is a patient, and discuss the reviewer's specific complaint or experience with the staff involved.
- 6. Pick Up the Phone and Respond to Negative Reviews Offline.** Discuss the issues/complaints the patient included in the review and any corrective action the practice plans to take. Ask the patient to revise or update the review in light of the discussion. Let the patient do the majority of the talking.

7. When Responding Online, Be Polite, but Brief.

Example: "Thank you so much for the kind words and recommendation" or "Thanks for the four stars!" Let the review "speak" for itself. For negative reviews, attempt to engage offline. For example, "Our patients are important to us and we encourage them to reach out to our office manager to discuss any issues or concerns (insert phone number)."

8. Keep Language Generic. Avoid using the pronoun "you" in responses. Try "patients are our priority," instead of "we are glad *you* enjoyed *your* visit."

9. Restate Policies or Practice Philosophy. Example: "we strive to provide the highest levels of patient satisfaction."

10. Report the Review to the Social Media Platform. All platforms have their own specific policies regarding reporting or contesting reviews. The first step is to review those policies and flag the post for review by the platform.

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