

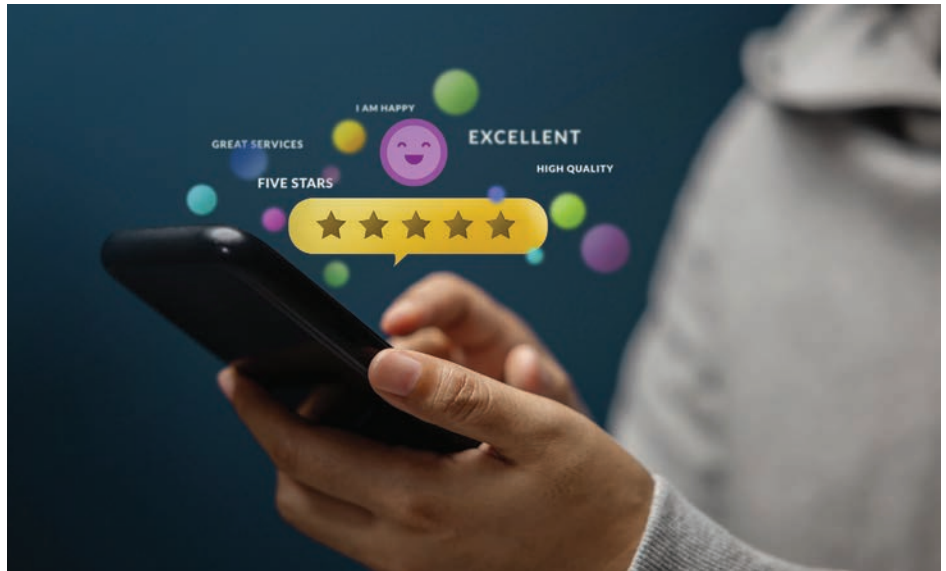


BY JARROD SHAPIRO, DPM

Online Reviews: Love ‘Em or Hate ‘Em

Unfortunately, most rating sites are stacked against you.

The other day, a patient at our practice waited too long for one of our doctors, stormed out of the office, and immediately posted a one-star review on one of the online review sites. The group practice works hard to satisfy our patients both medically and psychologically, so this created somewhat of a buzz, questioning the legitimacy of online rating systems. Should patients put stock in these doctor rating sites? Do they provide information that actually helps patients decide whom to see? Are these sites fair to doctors?



Using myself as a guinea pig for this discussion, I googled myself and found my Healthgrades rating to be first on the list (Figure 1). Now, to be clear, I’ve looked myself up exactly two times in my professional career—once when informed about a disgruntled patient who posted a scathing review (you couldn’t help but look) and today. No one has ever been hired to “manage” my reputation, and nothing has been done to modify the rating, such as to enter fake reviews.

You can’t blame any company for helping legitimate medical providers to improve their reputations because the system is stacked against providers from the start.

Digging Deeper

Before going deeper into the reviews, a few things stand out here. First, although the 4.5 out of 5.0 stars review is complimentary (better than something less), it’s the details that are left out. It doesn’t say what characteristics lead to this rating. It doesn’t state if this is based on clinical or surgical outcomes or if someone simply liked or disliked the doctor’s bedside manner (or the staff for that matter).

Were these patients grading the doctor or their experience with the staff? Since the number is an average, some patients might have given a very low number and others a very high number, leading to the 4.5-star average. Also, there are only 8 reviews. Is that a reasonable sample size? Not a chance.

When you scroll down a bit further, you’ll note that someone gave one star while the other seven were 5 stars (Figure 2). Dr Shapiro is looking a little less bright and shiny! You may also note the statement “...5 with a written review.” Now, only 5 of the 8 reviews actually made comments, which is even less legitimate as an in-

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Dr. Jarrod Shapiro, DPM

Podiatry* • Male • Age 51

Dr. Jarrod Shapiro, DPM is a podiatry specialist in Pomona, CA and has over 20 years of experience in the medical field. He graduated from SAMUEL MERRITT COLLEGE in 2003. He is ...

★★★★★ 4.5 (8 ratings) [Leave a review](#)

Figure 1: Shapiro Healthgrades rating, accessed 9/10/2024.

PRESENT Podiatry

PRESENT Podiatry (podiatry.com) is a podiatrist-owned-and-run company that proudly serves as the largest provider of online CME to the podiatry profession. One of the key lectures in their online CME collection is highlighted below.

Online Reviews (from page 29)

formation source because it creates a bias toward those willing to make statements. When looking through the specific comments, the person who gave the rating of 1 out of 5 stars didn't

Commonly Treated Disorders?

Scrolling down the page, you then find this ridiculous description of what disorders I supposedly most commonly treat (Figure 3). Somehow, this information is based on "treat-

Likelihood to recommend Dr. Shapiro

4.5 ★★★★★
8 ratings, 5 with a written review



Figure 2: Slightly more detailed star rating.

Do we really know if these patients actually saw me? Couldn't someone have been directed to enter positive statements and a higher star rating?

make a comment. That's too bad because if they felt that strongly that Dr Shapiro was a poor doctor, it would have been interesting to see why.

Interestingly, the basic information shown is mostly correct, except for me being located in Pomona, CA. Finally, you have to wonder about the appropriateness of posting one's age. It's really not fair to post anyone's age, as if that's an indicator of a good doctor. There are lots of excellent younger doctors and (thankfully) a smaller number of poor older doctors. Doesn't this breed a discriminatory ageism? Why is it ok for patients to discriminate based on age, but it is unacceptable for a doctor to do the same thing?

ment records". What does that mean? Did they access my EMR and perform a data analysis? Unlikely. This information is completely erroneous. I'm in general podiatric private practice, which means treating a large number of different lower extremity complaints. To be honest, I probably treat more toenail pathology than

anything else, and the surgical procedures vary widely between forefoot and rearfoot/ankle complaints. This info, then, is totally inaccurate.

Now, the point of accessing a rating system like this for patients is to determine if you want to see me for your foot and ankle issues. Does this provide enough information to make that decision? Not a chance. Does it really say anything about the experience you would have coming to the office? Nope. How about the complication rates for various procedures or the success/failure rates? Zero. Does it describe my board certifications or special experience? Unfortu-

What Dr. Shapiro treats most often

Based on treatment records, we have identified the following as areas of care that Dr. Shapiro treats most frequently.

	Treatment Frequency
• Osteoarthritis of Foot	Normal
• Osteoarthritis of Ankle	Normal
• Bunionette	Normal

Figure 3: Assumed commonality of pathologies treated.

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PRACTICE PERFECT

Online Reviews (from page 30)

nately, not. Do we really know if these patients actually saw me? Couldn't someone have been directed to enter positive statements and a higher star

these rating systems, you'll certainly find something potentially damaging to one's reputation. In fact, as mentioned above, the other time I accessed a rating system was for a highly negative review some years

panies to create ways to "manage" doctors' reputations online. This boils down to burying negative comments under a mountain of positive ones. You can't blame any company for helping legitimate medical providers to improve their reputations because the system is stacked against providers from the start.

The bottom line is, it is a simplified, likely inaccurate, snapshot of a very small number of supposed patients which can't really help anyone make a legitimate decision whether or not to see a specific doctor. It's clear that for good or bad these rating systems are here to stay, but we should all be vigilant as to the potential damage these can cause and to consider ways to minimize the damage when it occurs. **PM**

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Dr. Shapiro is editor of PRESENT Practice Perfect. He joined the faculty of Western University of Health Sciences, College of Podiatric Medicine, Pomona, CA in 2010.

It's clear that for good or bad these rating systems are here to stay, but we should all be vigilant as to the potential damage these can cause and to consider ways to minimize the damage when it occurs.

rating? How do we know these patients actually saw me and not someone else? In fact, there's another podiatrist in the area with the same last name. He's a nice guy, and patients have confused us in the past, so why not here? Maybe he's the 5-star doc and I'm much lower. Who knows?

Now, if you look at enough of

back. Unfortunately, you cannot respond in any way to negative comments to defend yourself because it could confirm you saw the patient and that may create a HIPAA violation. These negative comments live forever on the internet to plague doctors in perpetuity, leaving an opening for "reputation management" com-