

Tips for Responding to Online Reviews

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Top Five Recommendations:

- **Acknowledge feedback quickly** – Consumers turn to social media for information and expect healthcare organizations to monitor online feedback, especially on their own social media pages and high-traffic sites. It's important for organizations to perceive online reviews as valuable patient feedback. Acknowledging those activities validate patient feelings and show an organization's commitment to providing quality care. Consider having individuals closely monitoring accounts and providing feedback within 24 hours.
- **Keep responses anonymous** – It is extremely important to maintain HIPAA compliance when responding to online reviews. By providing generic responses, without PHI or individual patient care details, an organization can safeguard itself against fines and other penalties.
- **Adhere to standard protocols** – Create and follow standard protocols for responding to online reviews. Determine the appropriate individual(s) to monitor online feedback. Establish time frames for online feedback reviews and responses. Use pre-approved, HIPAA-compliant responses for positive and negative feedback. If possible, remove feedback that contains offensive language or hate speech and use a templated statement about removing that type of language.
- **Use templated responses** – Developing a few responses for positive and negative reviews can ensure that they are generic, HIPAA-compliant, timely and remove any bias or anger that might present itself in individual responses. These templates can be reviewed by your insurance risk management team and providers for

approval and quickly used when a new review is submitted.

- **Address direct issues offline** – If an organization receives an online review with allegations of negligence or non-factual information, use a generic response online and don't address any specifics. If appropriate, ask the reviewer to contact the organization to address any concerns. Communication over the phone or in person will increase the likelihood of understanding and compromise.

Top Five Cautions:

- **Don't respond in anger** – Unfortunately, there are times when consumers will post incorrect, rude or defamatory reviews. Responding in anger could lead to HIPAA privacy violations or online back and forth fighting for the world to see. It's better to use a templated response and try to address the issue offline.
- **Don't private message** – Online messaging and email is not private, and HIPAA violations may occur if PHI is included in any online activities on behalf of an organization.
- **Don't give medical advice** – Medical advice, appointment scheduling, medication prescriptions/refills, lab results, billing issues, etc. should never be provided or discussed online. Those actions should only be conducted with established patients in person, over the phone or through a secure healthcare portal after patients have consented to participate and understand emergency issues shouldn't wait for online portal responses.
- **Don't delete reviews** – Consumers understand that even the best organizations and providers receive negative online reviews. Unless the review contains profane language or hate speech, organizations should leave the review and ensure they have responded, showing other consumers that they review feedback and are committed to communication and improving their quality/service.
- **Don't alter content** – Loss of confidence in an organization will occur if responses are altered. In today's world, online consumers routinely take screen shots of online reviews and reply messages. If a message is altered, the evidence might still remain available and could be used against an organization. Also, it's important to remember that patients can disclose their own PHI, but the organization cannot repeat or verify/deny without authorization.

Sample Online Compliment/Complaint Responses:

- **Compliment** - Our practice aims to deliver the highest quality patient care. We love to hear about positive experiences. Thank you for your comments.
- **Compliment** - Thank you so much. We really appreciate your kind words and will be sure to pass your feedback on to the staff.
- **Compliment** - Thanks for sharing this feedback with us!
- **Complaint** - Thank you for sharing your feedback with us. We apologize for your recent experience. Please call us at [phone number] so we can improve next time.
- **Complaint** - We are sorry to hear about your experience. We are committed to providing the best patient care. Please contact us at [phone number] so that we may speak with you and address any concerns.
- **Complaint with profanity** - Your message was removed because it did not meet our site standards. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact our office at [phone number].

The information provided in this resource does not constitute legal, medical or any other professional advice, nor does it establish a standard of care. This resource has been created as an aid to you in your practice. The ultimate decision on how to use the information provided rests solely with you, the PolicyOwner.

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