

Should You Trust Online Doctor Reviews?

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[/EINPresswire.com/](http://EINPresswire.com/) -- When looking for a new doctor, one of the first places people typically turn to these days is the Internet. Review sites are making it easier than ever to learn about other people's patient experiences with doctors. But are those reviews reliable?

While online reviews can be a good place to start, they are not always a true reflection of average patient

experiences or of how knowledgeable or skilled doctors are at their craft. According to the 2018 Executive Summary from [Review Trackers](#), 66.3% of consumers rated reviews as important when choosing a primary care physician (PCP). About 32% of users reported leaving negative reviews about PCP experiences, and around 28% of consumers said they left reviews of positive experiences with their PCPs. (Reviews of specialists were a couple of percentage points lower for both positive and negative scores.)

However, not all review sites are created equal – literally. A study by Hospital for Special Surgery (HSS) found discrepancies when reviewing the same physicians on three popular medical review sites: HealthGrades.com, Vitals.com, and RateMDs.com. They did find that on all three sites reviewers gave high and low scores based on the doctor's perceived competence and friendliness.

Another study published in the April 2018 issue of Mayo Clinic Proceedings found many negative online reviews reflected issues that were beyond the doctor's control, such as customer wait times or staff friendliness. However, on traditional patient satisfaction survey, these low scoring review-site doctors often scored about the same as physicians without negative online reviews.

One thing to keep in mind with review sites is that there typically is no vetting of comments, other than sometimes pulling off reviews that could be considered libelous. Because many reviewers can stay anonymous, they often feel safer when leaving negative reviews and are more vocal than they might be otherwise. However, there is no way to ensure that the negative or positive review was legitimate. And once a negative review is there, it's very hard to get it



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removed.

Another thing to keep in mind is that most online reviews have more to do with the doctor's bedside manner than his or her medical skills.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM POPULAR DOCTOR REVIEW SITES ?

The following is a list of the most popular physician review sites and what patients can find on each of them:

1. [Yelp](#). One of the most trusted online review sites for all kinds of services, Yelp allows patients to rate experiences based on five stars, and they can add an anonymous personal review. Once a physician profile is claimed, doctors can respond to reviews either publicly or privately. If Yelp believes a review is untrustworthy, they are filtered and don't affect rankings. Physicians can set up their own Yelp profiles, allowing them to add photos and respond to reviews. They can also access metrics about their profiles, including things like user views, actions, and Yelp ad clicks.

2. [Healthgrades.com](#). This website claims to help around 1 million people a day find and connect with healthcare providers. Patients can search by specialty and preferred location, then filter by insurance, distance, availability, gender, age, and patient reviews. The site only lists doctors who have active profiles in the National Provider Identifier Registry, which is a government directory of active providers in the U.S.

The data for HealthGrades.com comes from various sources, including the National Provider Identifier Registry, patient surveys, government and third-party source claims, and information from patients and providers. Only doctors who have received reviews will have a star rating. Patients can leave both star-only ratings or stars plus a written review.

3. [HealthSoul.com](#). This is an online portal that allows healthcare consumers to share opinions about their experiences with healthcare providers. Historically, they have only provided reviews for hospitals and insurance, but they are in the process of adding physicians. Doctors ratings are currently in Beta testing and data is only available in certain cities and countries.

HealthSoul actually gives consumers 5 points to write a review, refer a friend, or make an appointment through the site. Once enough points are accumulated (100 minimum), they can be redeemed for Amazon gift cards. To rate a physician, patients are asked to give 5-star ratings in 5 categories: overall satisfaction, explanation of diagnosis and treatment plan, trust in provider, reception and nursing staff, ease of scheduling an appointment, and wait time. Reviewers are also asked whether they would recommend the physician, with the options of yes, no, or maybe. A minimum 5-word comment must be included.

4. [Medicare.gov Physician Compare](#). This site includes all physicians and clinicians that treat people with Medicare, although some may not accept Medicare's approved payment amounts or

may not be accepting new Medicare patients.

The site lets you compare up to 3 doctors at a time. The comparisons provide general information, including location and distance from your location, gender, year graduated, group affiliations, hospital affiliations, and participation about quality activity participation.

5. RateMDs.com. Founded in 2004, RateMds.com's mission is "to provide reliable tools and resources including firsthand patient reviews of medical professionals covering all branches of medicine, giving consumers the information they need to make informed choices as well as making it convenient and accessible to find the treatment they're looking for."

The website is designed to allow consumers to search for general practitioners, specialists, and healthcare facilities in their area and gain information based on patient experiences, ratings, and testimonials.

Currently, RateMDs.com has over 2.5 million physician ratings, all of which have been submitted by patients. It is not a comprehensive list, however, because the website leaves all additions and ratings up to its users. RateMDs is not a medical authority. Ratings are based on a 5-star system, with one star being the lowest score and five being the highest. There are four categories to rate: staff, punctuality, helpfulness, and knowledge. There is also a place to leave additional comments. The doctor's overall ratings are based on an average of the four category scores.

6. Vitals.com. Owned by MDx Medical, Inc., Vitals.com acquires its data from several public and private sources, including medical boards, federal websites, hospital surveys, third-party affiliates, and business alliances. Vitals.com also allows patient reviews. Patients rate their physicians on a scale from one to five stars, five being the highest. Patients can also leave a written comment about their experience, but they don't have to.

7. CareDash.com. According to their website, CareDash.com was founded in 2016 after CEO and Founder Ted Chan said he noticed two "troubling trends:" that healthcare provider review sites catered to higher socioeconomic patients, and that "many existing sites accepted financial compensation in exchange for removal of negative reviews." CareDash is geared more toward lower income patients and does not accept payment to remove reviews.

Doctor profile pages provide basic contact and geographic information, and sometimes a short narrative paragraph about the doctor: specialty, education, and hospital affiliations. The majority of the profile focuses on overall star ratings and patient reviews.

A GOOD STARTING POINT

The validity and reliability of Doctor review sites has been the subject of several studies, and a lot of members of the medical community are not big fans. Like it or not, however, they are growing in popularity and in numbers, and they are forcing the medical community to realize that customer service needs to be a priority in addition to quality medical care.

As a patient looking for a new doctor, review sites can be a good place to start your search. Just remember that not all review sites – or reviews – are created equal. Look for balance and check multiple sources.

Finally, keep in mind that most reviewers focus on things such as wait times, ease of making an appointment, and staff friendliness. When it comes to serious conditions, however, these factors may not be as important to you as the doctor's actual medical expertise and skills.

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