

# Why doctors want to be rated by patients: feedback increases empathy and boosts morale

## ABSTRACT OF STUDY CONDUCTED IN 2015

**Introduction:** The internet is both a democratising and disruptive force. Despite the role that online patient reviews play in this, there is a lack of research concerning the effect that collecting online feedback has had on those clinicians who are already collecting it. Patient experience is increasingly recognised as a key component of the quality of healthcare. Different methods to collect this information have been used with varying effectiveness. Little is known of doctors' beliefs, motivations and concerns regarding asking for patient experience feedback. This is the first study to examine the impact on doctors and how being rated and reviewed online might affect attitudes, communication and behaviour.

**Background:** The culture of giving online feedback for products and services is well established globally. In the hospitality sector, 69% of consumers already use online feedback to aid in decisions<sup>1</sup>, there are over 142.8 million consumer reviews on Amazon<sup>2,3</sup>. The use of online feedback is set to rise by 29% among 18-24 year olds over the next five years.<sup>1</sup> Consumers are increasingly relying on the experiences of others to aid in decision making. In Germany in 2013, 32% of people had heard of physician-rating websites with 11% already posting reviews online<sup>13</sup>. The Chinese website hadof.com has 314 624 doctors registered, of which 37% had received reviews from the public.<sup>14</sup> It seems evident therefore, that the trend of reviewing doctors online is global and growing rapidly<sup>6,7,9,12</sup>. However, the quality and content of information about clinicians varies greatly,<sup>8,9</sup> and there is little online to help identify good providers.

High patient satisfaction ratings are linked to improved clinical outcomes,<sup>4,5</sup> with high scores significantly associated with lower mortality and readmission rates. Better patient perceptions of cleanliness are associated with lower MRSA and *C. difficile* infection rates.<sup>6</sup>

The change to the doctor-patient dynamic and the fear of harm to reputation brought by online reviews, has raised concerns within the profession.<sup>6,8,9,21-23</sup> However, the growing body of evidence showing that patient experience correlates strongly with quality and outcomes, with the association between clinical outcomes and online ratings at least as strong as for traditional measures of patient experience,<sup>6,7</sup> suggests that attitudes must change if continuing improvements are to be made for the benefit of patients.<sup>5</sup>

**Methods:** An electronic survey tool consisting of polynomial, Likert-type items and free text responses was designed to study experiences of doctors who currently collect real time patient feedback using iWantGreatCare. It was distributed to all frequent participants, defined as doctors who had received at least 5 patient reviews in the last 4 months (n=258). All UK doctors are registered on iWantGreatCare and over 3.5 million reviews have been posted by patients since 2008.

Results are given as number (%) and median [range] as appropriate.

**Results:** There was a 29% response rate (88% male). The average number of individual patient reviews received by those invited to take part was 15 [5-250].

Most respondents (86%) had been collecting online feedback for more than a year, 43% for >2 years. The majority (59%) worked in an acute setting, 15% in primary care and 5% in the community. The commonest specialty of respondents was surgery (40%), other specialties were represented including medicine (23%), general practice (12%), anaesthetics (8%), diagnostic including radiology (5%) and other (12%). Most respondents worked with adult patients (84%) and a minority chiefly with paediatric patients (13%). Respondents were not recent graduates, but had been practising medicine for some time – 87% for >10 years.

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### The experience of collecting patient feedback was overwhelmingly affirmative:

- 100% said that the majority of feedback received was positive
- 96% felt the experience met or exceeded expectations
- 83% would recommend other doctors to ask for feedback
- 80% are comfortable with reviews being available on a public website
- 77% reported improved morale
- 72% had learned something from feedback
- 57% thought that continuous feedback increased the empathy they show to patients

### When asked about motivation, the commonest reasons given for engagement were:

- Continuous personal or professional improvement (79%)
- To meet professional or regulatory requirements (68%)
- To monitor whether I meet patient expectations (61%)
- Patients' ratings are a fundamental metric of my clinical skills (59%)

Many respondents discovered through feedback that patients' priorities were not always what they had expected and 26% sought ways of increasing patient engagement.

### Specific comments included:

“It takes a leap of faith to start out, but patients are generous with their praise...”

“It is humbling and a great privilege to have people write positive things about you – especially when you often feel that it is a great battle to provide patients with the kind of care which you deem appropriate.”

“It improves my self esteem & enables me to provide better care.”

**Conclusion:** Doctors' experiences of real time, transparent patient feedback are overwhelmingly positive. Benefits to doctors include improved morale and learning from specific reviews, a means for continued professional development, and meeting regulatory standards. Potential benefits to patients include both the improved morale of doctors and increased empathy from healthcare professionals. Doctors would recommend the process to their colleagues and we hope that, as the concept of asking for feedback becomes more widespread, we will reach a tipping point where this becomes the norm and all patients are enabled to provide honest feedback to improve the care they receive.

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