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Smoke, Mirrors, and Doctor Reviews

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No one can argue that online doctor reviews do not have impact. It is a great feeling to get a positive review and a terrible feeling to get a negative review, especially if it is not accurate.

There are some pretty good things about online reviews because they can hold doctors accountable if they are not providing good patient care and service. Prior to social media and online reviews, surgeons were almost immune to critique other than word of mouth. Although word of mouth can have impact, it pales in reverberation to the depth of social media. Whereas 20 years ago, a disgruntled patient could influence a handful of listeners, today it can be hundreds of thousands or millions.

Anyone with common sense realizes great reviews may come from family, friends, or even paid reviewers, and bad reviews can come from jealous competitors,



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naysayers, or someone that is simply put off by one's level of success. Somewhere between superlative and dreadful reviews lies the "actual review." It is unfortunate that most review sites allow anonymity without proof of actually being a patient. If a reviewer actually had to prove they were a registered patient and provide their name, good and bad reviews would be more tempered and accurate.

The purpose of this article (and personal story) is to show the deceitful level some people will descend to in order to make a good surgeon look bad. My staff and I work very hard to deliver excellence in cosmetic facial surgery with patient safety and predictable outcomes. We truly enjoy our job and actually like coming to work, and it shows. Ninety-eight percent of our reviews are positive, and I believe it relates to our level of commitment. We have a few borderline reviews, and my ego can tolerate the "I had to wait too long" or "the parking lot was full" type of review. I take them seriously and try to act on them.

Every once in a while, we get a scathingly negative review that is totally fabricated. This is unfortunate because it can falsely influence many potential patients. This is not uncommon and usually has to do with jealousy or monetary dealings. In my experience, these come from someone with a relationship with a jealous competitor or a patient who had some negative monetary experience such as not getting a refund because their "Botox did not work." These are generally not scorching reviews relevant to an accurate and/or significant surgical experience. They are usually little things.

My recent personal experience relates to surfing the web and coming across a vitriolic review of my office and me from a "patient." Her comments were horrific and certainly not consistent with the way I am or the way I run my practice.

These words were so contrived and upsetting I decided to attempt to pursue this person in the digital wasteland of social media. As I expected, the post was made under a false name. With some extensive digital snooping, we were able to identify the actual name of the patient and later the address. We had no record of this patient and never treated anyone by this name. My attorney agreed these constituted libelous and deceitful comments and we could initiate a lawsuit. Before taking such action, we gave the person the chance to take down the review,

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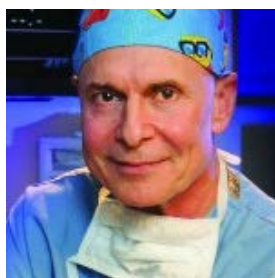
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admit the review was false, and to write a formal apology, which she did.

I was lucky. I was able to find this person and identify them as a fraud. How many patients saw this review before it was removed, and how or if it hurt my reputation I will never know. What I do know is this sort of selfish jealous deceit is common and unfortunate, as most times it is impossible to track down the offender.

My advice is to always run your practice in a way that naturally generates positive reviews. When you do get a negative review, respond to it in a humble patient-centric manner. If you get a false review, do all you can to find the source and get the review taken down.



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