Patient sentiment report

An analysis of 7 million physician reviews
Healthcare consumerism has compelled physician practices, hospitals and health systems to reorient their care models with patients at the center, as well as to offer the access, functionality, and convenience modern consumers expect.

With this convergence, the healthcare industry is beginning to recognize the value consumers place on access to easily accessible and transparent information and services. In the same way consumers use OpenTable to reserve a table at a favorite restaurant, go to Amazon to make purchases, or visit TripAdvisor to book a hotel, they expect the healthcare industry to provide convenient access to accurate information and empower patients to make more informed decisions about their care.

Continued innovation in technology has given consumers the tools and resources needed to evaluate and select a physician — a relationship of such importance to consumers that they rank the choice of their provider second only to their choice of a spouse.1 The stakes in healthcare are high because the selection of a physician is personal. This is why, according to BrightLocal, 84% of patients consult online reviews before selecting a physician.

In an unprecedented study, Healthgrades and Medical Group Management Association (MGMA) have analyzed nearly 7 million patient reviews and comments submitted about providers by Healthgrades visitors. The analysis reveals the factors patients consistently cite as being most important to their overall experience with a provider. Overwhelmingly, patients highlight non-clinical factors when evaluating care quality, including physician personality, time spent with the physician, and interactions with office staff. Consistently – in both positive and negative reviews – users describe how their experience with a provider made them “feel,” whether the doctor was willing to “listen,” and if physicians and staff members were “friendly.” While providers rightly focus on patient outcomes as a measure of quality, this new analysis reflects a patient population that doesn’t just want to see a doctor; they want to be seen.

The research provides a snapshot of what consumers say about their doctors, as well as spotlights opportunities for physician practices, hospitals and health systems to serve patients more holistically and enhance these personal aspects of care.

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1Research conducted for Healthgrades by Harris Interactive

7 million patient reviews and comments analyzed
Patients want a meaningful connection with their provider.

Overall, patients cite compassion, comfort, patience, personality, staff, bedside manner, knowledge, time, insurance, appointments, and communication as important. More than 69% of all patient reviews of their physician mention at least one of these factors.

While clinical outcomes are an important indicator of hospital and physician quality, the analysis shows patients are increasingly seeking a holistic approach to their care, taking into consideration subjective factors like “compassion,” “comfort,” bedside manner,” and “office staff” when choosing their doctors.

Patients were far less likely to describe specific treatments or outcomes, even after visiting a surgical specialist. In reviews that do mention them, the reference is typically incidental to the personal and emotional factors listed to the right.

Key takeaway

Healthcare consumers view healthcare first and foremost as a personal interaction and not just a medical transaction.

Scott Booker
CEO, Healthgrades

One way to save consumers time and offer them a convenient way to reach their provider is to offer online appointment scheduling options. Recent research from Stax, commissioned by Healthgrades, found that more than 80% of consumers prefer physicians who display available appointments online to those who do not offer such a service, even if the physician with online appointments had lesser availability.
There is slight variation in how patients assess their doctors based on their gender.

While there is not a significant difference in how patients rate their physician by gender, female patients rate their male doctors slightly more favorably than male patients rate their female doctors.

Key takeaway

Though the differences are not significant, it is interesting that there is some variation in how patients rate their male or female providers, especially given the groundswell of conversation about gender bias occurring across industries.
Patients' feedback about their doctors is overwhelmingly positive.

In the nearly 7 million submitted star ratings on Healthgrades, patient feedback about their doctors is overwhelmingly positive, and the average star rating for a doctor is 4-stars. Further, in certain surgical specialties patients rate their provider higher than they rate their primary care physician, suggesting patient affinity for a provider increases with the stakes of the care provided.

Many patients report feeling overwhelmed in their healthcare journey – navigating complex processes and payment systems. They may not be able to predict how changes and trends will affect them, but they do know how they feel when they talk to their doctor.

Key takeaway

Doctors who inspire a sense of trust, understanding and confidence stand out, and patients are eager to help other people find this same confidence in their own care. Quality matters—but so do relationships.

The average rating across all surveys is 4-stars

Almost 70% of all ratings are 5-star ratings

22% of all surveys are only 1-star

2, 3, and 4-star ratings make up less than 10%

Bill Wyatt

VP of Data Science, Healthgrades

"The higher average ratings for surgical specialties - led by pediatric surgical specialty - suggests patient affinity for a provider increases with the stakes of the care provided. The more risk associated with a treatment or procedure, the more patients depend on doctors and their staff members to provide emotional support along with medical expertise."
Key takeaway

While a provider may not always be able to control his or her appointment schedule due to unforeseen circumstances, this feedback stresses the importance of placing value on patients’ time, both during the appointment and in the waiting room. In cases when delays are unavoidable, clear and friendly communication from office staff may be key in maintaining patient satisfaction.

Patients value the time they spend with their provider over a number of other factors.

In both positive and negative open-comment reviews, patients place top importance on the time a provider spent with them, particularly answering questions, listening to concerns, and making sure patients fully understood their condition or procedure.
Quality healthcare is a team effort.

Of the attributes most commonly mentioned in a review, the topic cited most frequently in both a positive or negative review is the interaction that the patient has with a doctor’s staff.

In the text analysis of the most commonly used phrases in negative open-comment reviews, office staff interactions rise to the top.

Key takeaway

While the appointment is the anchor of a doctor’s office visit, staff members are typically the “face” of the office experience. In some cases, a patient may spend more time interacting with staff members than the providers themselves. Even when their individual appointments are successful, providers benefit when their entire office staff creates a positive experience for patients. Ensuring staff members have the resources and recognition to offer a high level of customer service reflects well on the practice as a whole, and patients are more likely to associate a pleasant office experience with quality care, and to refer friends and family.

It’s clear from the data what most people already intuitively know: the patient experience extends deeper and further than the walls of a surgical suite or exam room. Our data corroborates the crucial nature of our members’ role in the support of the physician-patient relationship through people, process and technology.

Dr. Halee Fischer-Wright, MD, MMM
President and CEO, MGMA
WHAT IT MEANS

For patients

Consumers continue to embrace transparency in healthcare and are a driving force in the changes taking place across the industry. Platforms like Healthgrades amplify the voices of patients and empower them to guide the industry toward more holistic, comprehensive care that treats the person, not just the condition.

In the meantime, patients also have an opportunity to expand the metrics by which they evaluate providers and take a balanced view of treatment outcomes, care philosophy and patient experience in the care setting. Patients may mistakenly assume all doctors have the same training and experience, and therefore qualities like compassion or patience are the only differentiating factors. In truth, physician experience and hospital quality can vary widely – even within the same city – and patients must be aware of all data points when choosing care.

For providers

Without a doubt, physicians are under increasing pressure in today’s healthcare environment in terms of demands on their time, new reimbursement models and evaluation of clinical outcomes. In day-to-day practice, a focus on clinical quality and patient outcomes is undoubtedly the highest priority for providers in order to deliver the best possible care.

However, more providers are recognizing that a positive relationship with patients drives better care. Patients are more likely to listen, understand and comply with treatment plans when they feel a personal connection to their doctors. Providers who understand this are more likely to have happier patients – and more of them – who in turn become healthier patients.
WHAT IT MEANS

For practices

Every member on a medical practice’s team contributes to a positive physician-patient relationship. Practices will achieve desired outcomes through a comprehensive approach to clinical quality and business leadership.

For health systems

In the same way health systems use outcomes data to improve clinical quality, they can use this analysis of patient sentiment to understand what consumers are looking for when it comes to a positive patient-physician relationship. Consumers think of their care providers in terms of the doctor or practice where they receive care, not the health system they are affiliated with. The health system represents the sum of its physicians. There is an opportunity for health systems to support their physicians by providing the experience patients seek.

Throughout all open-comment reviews, patients consistently noted whether they “would recommend” or “would never recommend” a doctor. Like any service, health systems are built on word of mouth. Patients seek care they can trust from the friends, family and neighbors they already trust, and then validate those names online at sites like Healthgrades. By developing community outreach and marketing strategies that foster a personal connection with their neighbors, health systems can put a more human face on local health—and encourage more patients to seek out their care.
Healthgrades analyzed data from patient experience surveys submitted by Healthgrades users through the website for specific providers. This dataset includes more than 6 million star ratings and 1 million open-comment reviews.

From a sample of 500,000 open-comment reviews from 43 markets, the Healthgrades data science team performed topic modeling through n-gram analysis to identify common sequences of n-consecutive words in a sentence. This allowed the team to highlight the factors most frequently mentioned in both positive and negative open-comment reviews.

The n-grams were aggregated into core themes which represent common areas of patient focus. Looking at the 100,000 most positive comments, the core themes of staff demeanor/attitude, overall comfort level experience by the patient, friendliness of the provider, caring attitude of the provider, and a sense of overall provider bedside manner were the most common. In a similar evaluation of the 100,000 most negative comments, themes were poor staff attitude, poor provider bedside manner, lack of response to phone calls/inquiries, and the amount of time spent/wasted in the office.

Healthgrades does not intend for patient ratings and reviews to act as a proxy for clinical outcomes, but rather to provide insights about what type of experience a patient can expect when seeing a specific provider. The fact that patients tend to focus on personal interactions in their feedback suggests providers have an opportunity to increase transparency around their own clinical outcomes and make patients aware of the importance of physician experience or hospital quality when choosing care.
WHO WE ARE

As the nation’s No. 1 site for connecting patients and doctors, Healthgrades helps millions of people each month find the right provider. We empower healthcare consumers with comprehensive data about provider experience and hospital quality so they can make informed, confident decisions about their care.

But healthcare isn’t just about data—it’s about people. That’s why millions of Healthgrades users come back our site to provide feedback about their healthcare experiences. These ratings and reviews together represent a key factor in helping others in the Healthgrades community find the highest quality care for themselves and their families.

Healthgrades provides a unique service to healthcare consumers, giving users access to both clinical experience data and personal feedback from real patients to create a well-rounded picture of quality care.

Medical Group Management Association (MGMA) is the premier association for professionals who lead medical practice. Since 1926, through data, people, insights, and advocacy, MGMA empowers medical group practices to innovate and create meaningful change in healthcare. With a membership of more than 40,000 medical practice administrators, executives, and leaders, MGMA represents more than 12,500 organizations of all sizes, types, structures and specialties that deliver almost half of the healthcare in the United States.